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# LISE FLEURON.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

GEORGES OHNET,

*Author of "Le Maître de Forges," "La Comtesse Sarah," "La Grande Marnière," &c., &c.*

BY

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

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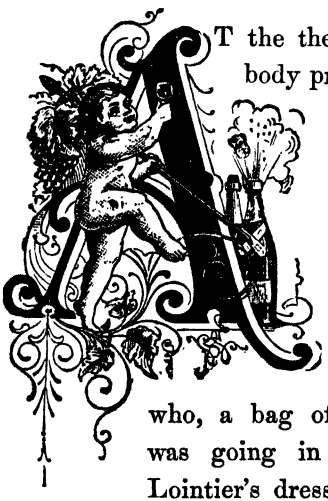
## CHAPTER I.



AT the theatre that evening everybody proved to be exceptionally irritable. Rombaud had come at an earlier hour than usual, and he began by fining the *concierge*, because, in the passages of the second floor, he had met young Trésorier, the stockbroker's son, who, a bag of *bon-bons* in his hand, was going in the direction of Rose Lointier's dressing-room. And, furious, pouring out his wrath on the head of the poor devil, he cried—

"A fine of twenty francs, do you hear, Rober-

val? . . I will have no *gommeux* in the theatre . . especially with Rose Lointier! Many thanks! Cretet would only have to come. . . He would be pleased! And he would give me an outrageous critique the next day! . . ."

Then, exciting himself, and liquidating, at one single time, his discontents of the whole week—

"Where is Campoint? Does he think that I pay him to do nothing? He is still at the *café* close by, playing dominoes! Things cannot go on like that! Fine him twenty francs! If he is not satisfied, he can go away and get up some Popular Concerts!"

He paused. Madame Bréval had just entered, and was regarding him with a severe glance. She shook her head, and, with her grandest, marquise-like airs, passed on, saying, with compressed lips—

"Oh! how disagreeable it is to hear loud voices! And how ungentlemanly! And what bad manners!"

Rombaud took a step towards his *grand premier rôle*, intending to make her a sharp rejoinder. "She was, indeed, well able to play the great lady—she, who lived with that *raté* of the *Concours de Rome* who not only had never been able to get an operetta accepted at the Eldorado, but who gave himself the airs of an unappreciated and clever man." But,

despite all, Madame Bréval overawed him. And, kicking open the iron door, which gave back the sound of a gong, he walked towards his cabinet. In the lobby, at the foot of the stairs, he found himself face to face with Clémence, who was descending, her train borne by Julienne, and showing her pretty ankles encased in open work silk stockings, and her feet delicately shod with small shoes. He arrived opportunely. The actress was in a murderous temper, and it was with the prompter that she was exasperated. That idiot passed his time, in his box, brooding over his former domestic misfortunes.

"Do you know, he will aggravate me in the end, that old imbecile, with his maunderings. One of these evenings, without thinking of it, I shall listen to him; that will distract me, and I shall insult him grossly from the stage! . . . That would have a fine effect! . . ."

"People would believe that you were playing Molière. . . . That would be very flattering to you!" said the voice of Pavilly, who was coming down stairs.

"No, but, seriously, Rombaud, you must put him to the door," continued the actress, affecting not to have heard the comedian.

"At his age?" said Pavilly. "A poor *bonhomme* like him, who has been for twelve years in the house?"

"Well! let him clear up his ideas," cried Clémence, furiously. "What do I care for that!"

"You speak of it at your ease!" said Pavilly, whose eyes sparkled with malicious insolence. "He has not his beauty as a means of existence!"

Clémence could not find a word to reply. Open-mouthed, she watched Pavilly pass, who went tranquilly on his way. She turned red, then pale, and, in a broken voice, addressing Rombaud—

"That is how they treat me now, in this theatre! One may easily see that they look upon me as nothing! Moreover, the example is set by the head!"

She darted a withering glance at the manager, and, snatching the train of her dress from the hands of Julienne, desirous to make the insolence from which she had just suffered, recoil heavily upon some one—

"Let go my robe. . . You are dragging me backwards. . . Do you wish to make me fall?"

She caught it up herself, violently crushing the costly lace with which it was trimmed, and went upon the stage, uttering a cry of impotent anger.

Everyone looked excited. There were whisper-

ings, goings and comings. They passed from hand to hand an evening paper, where an account of the duel was already published, and in which it was stated that the wound of M. B. de Lantenac inspired serious uneasiness. In a corner, Roberval, who, before becoming a stage-manager, had been *prévôt* of the 5th Dragoons, was giving, with a competent air, explanations upon the thrust that had wounded the journalist, and was repeating—

"Five *centimètres* in depth! He strikes hard, M. de Brives! . . . It could not happen to us soldiers in the regiment, because the *maître d'armes* is on the ground, and parries the mortal thrusts. ."

"As he parries them, how do you know that they are mortal?" said Pavilly, in a perfectly grave tone.

And Roberval, well up in his subject, and recovering his military sentiments, answered gravely—

"*On le suppose.*"

"In the cavalry they say, '*On le présuppose,*'" rejoined Pavilly, with the voice and gesture which formerly gained him so great a success as Kirchet, in the *Fils de Famille.*

"A little silence, *mes enfants*—they are playing," said Roberval, who began to laugh.

"*Tenez*, look at Desmazures getting up the steam," said Mortagne to his comrades.

Near the door through which he was about to make his appearance, the old actor was working himself into a fury in order to catch the spirit of the part to be played, and, addressing a pillar supporting the scenery, as if speaking to a living being, he recited, in a low tone, this fiery improvisation—

"Miscreant! *Canaille!* Thou didst hope to entangle in thy nets this improvident young man, but thou didst calculate without me, and I am here, dost thou understand? I am here!"

His eyes took a terrible expression, he raised his arm threateningly. Then, suddenly, pushing open the door of painted canvas, he rushed on the stage, boiling with his feigned anger, and hurled his rejoinder in an impassioned voice. . . .

"Do you see that he is really in the shoes of the *bonhomme?*" said Pavilly. "These conscientious actors are becoming rare! . . ."

He turned away upon his heel. Clémence was approaching the stage manager.

"*Dites donc*, Roberval, have you had the revolver in the fourth act arranged as I asked you?"

"They brought it back to-day only, from the gunsmith. He has eased the trigger. . . ."

"So much the better! I have hurt my fingers by putting it on full cock, and, one of these even-

ings, it would not have gone off. . . . You can see from here Mademoiselle Fleuron, *en plan*, without her pistol shot! . . . Her most striking situation would have been spoiled. It would have been said that I did it from malice! . . ."

She smiled with bitterness, and crossed the stage, to go to await her cue. Behind the scenes old Massol, conversing with Fanny Mangin and Madame Bréval, said—

"For twenty years, I have not read what the journalists say of me. Ought one to pay attention to all that they write? It is none the less certain that when a good-for-nothing fellow, like that M. Lantenac, finds a brave man, like M. de Brives, to shut his mouth with a sword thrust, *mes enfants*, it is *pain bénit*."

Lise was passing. She blushed and lowered her head. Since she had arrived at the theatre there was, around her, a confused murmuring in which she could only distinguish the name of de Brives. And, as if this name was cast at her thus, as an accusation, she turned away, full of trouble. It seemed to her that the whole world would read in her eyes that she belonged to Jean. There was a vague anger amongst the women, all jealous in their hearts, of that Lise, who had met with so valiant a defender.

They followed their comrade with their eyes, as if she was a new and unknown woman. And, in fact, they discovered in her a charm, a grace, a beauty which had never before struck them.

Happiness was without doubt transfiguring Lise. She had a brilliancy, a radiance, which irresistibly attracted the glance. And not divining that they admired her, placing that attention, which seemed to her painful, to the score of ill-will, Lise, embarrassed, ran to shut herself in her dressing-room, where, alone by herself, she could live over again in thought, those burning hours the *souvenir* of which appeared now to fill her whole existence.

Yet she could not close her door to those of her comrades who had always shown her sympathy, and who, one after the other, came to see her, to tell her of the satisfaction that they felt at the happy termination of the affair. Some of them, like Madame Bréval, spoke of everything except of Jean, affecting a reticence in extremely good taste; the others, like Albertine Rameau, "put their feet in the dish," declaring that de Brives had done *joliment* well, in at once taking offence, because now it was ended, no one would dare to say anything more.

Lise, on the rack, kept her countenance, and was

able, with tact and courtesy, to give each a suitable answer. Fanny Mangin, her neighbour, devoured by curiosity, had even established herself in Lise's dressing-room, which she had made fragrant with an armful of flowers, just brought up to her by the wife of the *concierge*. And there, with eyes sparkling, she questioned her comrade, eager to obtain her confidence.

"*Voyons*, now you will really tell me. You do love him, do you not? A man who has just fought for you? . . . In the first place you would be very ungrateful. And then, he is quite charming. Now tell me. . . ."

But Lise defended herself, with terrible embarrassment, not daring to deny, not wishing to confess. In the midst of this discussion, Clémence passed through the passage, and, contrary to her habit, she stopped— .

"*Dites donc*, Clémence," cried the red-haired beauty, "would you not be grateful, if M. de Brives had done for you as he has just done for Lise?"

The Italian paled slightly. Then, in a calm voice—

"Who tells you that Mademoiselle Fleuron is not grateful?"

She regarded Lise with an amiable smile,

observing the agitation in her glance, the flush on her cheeks, the trembling of her hands.

"Besides," added she, "these are her little secrets, and no one has a right to penetrate into them."

In the tone of the actress there was an asperity that made Lise raise her eyes. She was impressed, and suspected her hatred. But the correct bearing of Clémence, the preceding evening; the friendly words that she had said to her comrade, "You may rely upon the support of all of us;" the assistance that she had given to her on the stage, when Lise was paralysed by emotion; all the skilful manœuvres of her rival; returned to her mind. She reproached herself, asking with disquietude, whether, infected by the contagion, she also would grow ill-natured.

Clémence, uneasy at the gaze of Lise, said to herself, "Of what is she thinking? Does she suspect me?" She became wheedling and gracious, the better to deceive her.

"We have a full house, this evening; the second act has gone off well. . . . I am sure that our scene, presently, will produce a grand effect. All our friends are here. . . . And the great conqueror himself, from what Raynaud has this instant told me, has just arrived. . . ."

"Ah! ah!" sang upon two notes Fanny Mangin; then, in a voice clear and shrill as that of a young cock, she hummed gaily—

"Chantez, enfants des rivages d'Asie!
Oscar s'avance! Oscar. . . . Je vais le voir!"

"*Dis donc*, Lise, it is probable that he expects some thanks, the *Seigneur* Jean. . . . I suppose that you will at least embrace him! . . . You do not answer? My dear child, your coldness not only grieves me, but still more . . . astonishes me! *Bigre!* If the Marquis paid me the compliment to cross swords for me. . . . I should be capable of rewarding him for it by a caprice of twenty-four hours. And that would greatly surprise him, the dear man!"

"They are going to begin!" cried the voice of the call-boy from the staircase.

"*Eh! mes enfants!* I am not ready!" said Fanny Mangin.

And passing like a whirlwind, between Clémence and Lise, she regained her dressing-room. On the stairs the steps of the *artistes*, descending to the stage, were heard, and in bursts, when the iron door was opened, the strains of the orchestra, playing before the drawing up of the curtain, reached as far as the dressing-rooms.

Lise stood dreaming. All in her life was abruptly changed. She who, till that time, had never had anything to conceal, was compelled to dissemble and to feign. She had to watch over her thoughts, her words, and to take care to let nothing escape which might betray her. When Fanny Mangin questioned her, she, who was not in the habit of lying, had been silent. Her silence might be interpreted in an unfavourable sense. And then there would be never-ending gossip, the offensive echo of which would strike her to the heart.

She felt a great weariness. She asked herself if the whole of her life as an actress would glide away amongst these odious disputes. Disheartened, she remembered that, having dedicated herself to the public, she must expect to reap the benefit and to suffer the inconveniences of popularity. Upon the boards, she was subject to the good pleasure of all, she was exposed to every criticism as to every praise. She might expect applause or hissing. And her private life could no more escape curiosity, than could her public life.

She was seized with an immense longing to flee, to return to the obscurity of her past existence, when she was with her mother, working as a little seamstress. Then, her days glided by mono-

tonous, peaceful. She could not hope for great triumphs, but she might rely upon absolute tranquillity. She was not a prey to that monster with a thousand heads which is called the public. She was not the slave of the idle crowd and vowed to its pleasure. It was not necessary to laugh, when she desired to weep, and to weep, when she wished to laugh. She was a free creature; in fine, mistress of herself, and not an enthralled being, a hateful machine to amuse the idlers for their money.

Then the recollection of brilliant evenings returned to her, during which the whole of a distracted house palpitated at her feet, enraptured by her words, excited by her gestures, and assuring her glory by their unanimous acclamations. She thrilled—what was life without the intoxication of triumph? Was it worth preserving? Oh! to see herself the idol of that great town, to reign over it, to be its favourite, to awake passion, to be madly loved by all those spectators, and to pass along, before them, smiling and proud, reserving her tenderness for him, alone, who had known how to make her heart beat! To lay at his feet all her crowns of flowers, to offer up to him all her ovations; to erect, for his worship a mysterious altar, and to sacrifice on it the universal adoration! What a beautiful dream! And was it

not worth every effort that she must make to realise it!

She raised her head and smiled proudly. She had but to stretch out her hand; the goal was within her reach. And, admired, envied, she was sure of keeping Jean's love incessantly reanimated by her success. She was ashamed of her fears, and laughed at them. She felt herself still a young girl. But strength of mind would come to her, and then, she would no more recoil before the ever-reviving difficulties of her career. She thought that Jean was in the house, and quivering with passion, eager to please him, she descended to the stage.

There, she determined to begin to battle, and, instead of shunning her comrades, of seeking isolation, as she had done for the last two days, she approached the groups boldly, and with head erect. She assumed a joyous manner and an easy bearing. Besides, was not this a comedy? And was it more difficult to her to play a part in real life, than on the stage? She became coquettish and daring. She challenged Rombaud, who, talking with Madame Bréval had affected not to see her, and forced him to go to her, amazed and charmed at the same time. She applauded herself inwardly, and congratulated herself on her courage.

"You are radiant, this evening, Lise!" said Rombaud in a low tone, and devouring his *pensionnaire* with his eyes.

"I am always so when the house is full," rejoined she with an animated face. . . .

"Perhaps also," resumed he, with bitterness, "it is because some one is here to see you play?"

"Perhaps, *en effet!*" answered she, haughtily regarding her manager.

He could not support her glance, and, jingling the keys that he had in his pocket—

"I, myself, have been working for you to-day. You will see the journals to-morrow."

The expression of her face softened, and gracefully extending her hand to Rombaud—

"I thank you," said she. And, with the smile which rendered her so seductive: "I know that at the bottom of your heart you rather like me."

For the first time, Lise looked at Rombaud with caressing eyes, and spoke to him in a tender voice. He was moved to the depth of his being. This sceptic, who believed solely in his personal gratification, that ambitious man, who was prepared to sacrifice everything to his interest, felt himself capable of devotedness and of abnegation. For an instant

he held the hand of the young woman between his own, and much agitated—

"O Lise! if you could see," said he, "if you could understand. . . ."

With her fan she gave him a little tap on the fingers—

"Now, be wise, or we shall quarrel! I wish you to like me, but not more than I please! . . ."

He sighed deeply. His bad temper had died away. He was now melancholy, and, with ear strained, he listened to the charming voice of Lise, in the distance, who was playing. And he murmured—

"How that was said! What *finesse!* What delicate shades! Applaud then!"

A thunder of acclamations interrupted him. He began to walk up and down, at the farther end of the stage, behind the scenery, dreaming of all the success promised to him by such an actress. He had her for three years, attached to his theatre by a binding agreement. And once that time elapsed, he would keep her, whatever it might cost, if he had to pay her her weight in gold. His superstitious ideas had again taken root, and he said to himself with conviction, "Before engaging her, I failed in everything that I attempted. I might have played

*chefs-d'œuvres*, without making a single sou. With her I can play no matter what! Let her recite the Bible, and she would find means to produce an effect! It is she who is the fortune of this theatre!"

The curtain fell, in the midst of recalls and stampings.

"Before the curtain!" cried Rombaud himself, in a loud voice. And he began to applaud, from behind the scenes, carried away by the enthusiasm of the public.

When on the stage, Lise, with her eyes, had sought Jean in the house. At first she did not see him. He was upon a bracket-seat in the recess of the passage to the orchestra. He had wished to screen himself from the curiosity of the spectators who might know him. And, sitting in the shadow, at the angle of the first *baignoire*, he gave himself up to the delight of contemplating her whom he loved. He had before him a family of *bons bourgeois*, who talked, making their remarks in a loud voice. Jean amused himself by listening to them.

"It is Lise Fleuron," said the wife, "she, for whom that young man, you know . . . fought to-day with a journalist. . . . Your newspaper gave a full account of it this evening. . . ."

"She is very pretty!" said the husband.

"She is above all, very lady-like! . . . And how naturally she acts! Oh, *tiens!* she said, 'Are you quite sure of it?' exactly like Zélie. . . ."

Who was Zélie? Jean never knew. The situation had become thrilling, and the spectators were silent, absorbed in the piece. He carried back his attention to Lise, following her step by step, admiring the elegance of her attitudes, the grace of her movements. He felt the house growing warm, conquered by the actress; and he was encompassed as by a rising wave of passionate enthusiasm. He said to himself, with proud satisfaction, "That woman whom they applaud, whom they *fête*, and of whom they dream, is mine, mine alone. Those white shoulders, that fair hair, no one but myself will touch them with his lips. That sweet voice will become still more sweet to say to me, 'I love thee.'" And, perfectly happy, he tasted one of those deep delights that Lise longed to make him enjoy.

As he gazed at her with adoration, his eyes were struck as by a fiery dart. The glance of the actress had just met his own. Her face brightened, she was resplendent with happiness, and her lips were folded as if for a kiss. It was a sudden and power-

ful shock. He started. Across the house it seemed to him that the whole soul of the *artiste* had leaped towards him. Then Lise was again in her part, but there was in her delivery and in her gestures a more burning fervour. Anxious to please, straining towards success, she lavished the treasures of her youth, of her beauty, and of her talent, no longer on the public, but on him whom she adored. And, feeling the effect, captivated by the intoxication of the actress, the spectators, excited, charmed, clapped their hands, far from suspecting that the most impassioned testimony of their admiration was not of so much value to Lise as the silent, mute approbation of Jean, smiling in the background.

When the act was ended, de Brives allowed the wave of the people who were going out, to pass; then he walked towards the door of communication, situated near the front of the stage, on a level with the ground. The box-keeper knew him; she let him enter. Upon the stage, near the opening for the scenery, Rombaud was talking with the officer of the firemen on duty. He saw Jean coming, and his face darkened. He stretched out his hand to him without speaking. The young man did not desire to begin a conversation. He said, "Good evening," bowed, and withdrew. Passing through

the door at the farther end, he ascended rapidly to the first floor, and penetrated into the lobby of the dressing-rooms. He was going to visit Lise. But, desirous to save appearances, he affected to look for Madame Bréval's dressing-room. He inquired for it of a dresser, who was passing, carrying an embroidered petticoat quite rigid in its starched whiteness.

"At the end of the corridor, Monsieur—the door that you see down there. . . ."

"Many thanks."

Jean's voice made both Lise and Clémence start. Neither of them stirred. Lise, smiling, said to herself, "He is going first to see Madame Bréval; then he will come to see me." The other, livid, thought, "If he goes to Lise, it is that he is her lover." Her door was open, as always. She was sitting, with bare shoulders, before her toilet table, in her bodice, putting on her shoes. With a quick touch of the finger she turned up the gas, and, the bright light falling upon her ivory-white skin, she waited, her heart beating violently. Jean had arrived opposite her dressing-room. He did not affect not to see her, he did not stop, but he slightly slackened his pace, just enough to have time to bow, and to say with perfect courtesy—

"Good evening. . . Is all well? . . You

played your scene to perfection. . . I applauded you with all my might."

In a choked voice Clémence replied—

"Thanks!"

He was at Madame Bréval's door.

"Can one come in?"

"Who is there?"

"I, Jean de Brives. . . ."

"*Ah! mon Dieu!* wait a little. . . ."

The door opened, and the *grand premier rôle* appeared, hastily throwing a *peignoir* over her shoulders. She asked Jean to go in, but he excused himself, desiring to speak in the passage, so that it might be clearly understood that he had only gone up to thank her for the charming little message which she had sent him, on learning the happy result of his duel. How much he had been touched by her warm-hearted remembrance! And, in a loud voice, he proclaimed the kindness of Madame Bréval, and his gratitude. Then he said a few words about the piece, and announced that he would stay till the end.

In her dressing-room, Clémence, assailed by terrible suspicions, heard Jean, and said to herself, "His voice has a false ring; he is lying: it is not for Madame Bréval that he has come; it is for Lise!"

She saw all her combinations foiled, and the two lovers triumphant. All her perfidies had tended to this result, to give Lise more surely to Jean. She suffered horribly at this thought. She pictured them to herself together, happy, and she ground her teeth. She said to herself, "Will she always prevail over me, and shall I never, in my turn, triumph over her?"

She heard Jean take leave of Madame Bréval, and, with ears strained, she listened. A door opened and closed again, without a single word being pronounced, and Jean did not return. Clémence rose: she went outside her dressing-room, and, with frightful anguish, she saw the passage empty. Jean was with Lise.

She stood for an instant motionless, her eyes sunk in their sockets, asking herself if she should not open, she also, that door behind which the two young people were screened. She divined them to be in each other's arms, and she had a terrible desire to call aloud, to provoke a scandal, and to ruin her, that Lise, who gave herself the airs of a virtuous girl, and who had a lover. She darted into the lobby, and, seeing Fanny Mangin's dressing-room empty, she shut herself in it, leaning her head against the partition, eager to hear, pressing her

panting bosom, and biting her lips that she might not scream.

An indistinct murmur alone reached her ears. Lise having doubtless taken the precaution to open the window, Jean and she could converse in all security. Clémence, at the risk of being surprised by Fanny, seated herself upon the sofa in the dressing-room and waited, her arms drooping and powerless, her eyes fixed, with one thought turning in her aching heart, "He is her lover!"

By dint of detesting Lise, she had arrived at adoring Jean. Her caprice, stimulated by resistance, had become a passion. She thirsted for Jean's love, and, above all, she longed to take him from Lise. In the depraved mind of the Italian, that fancy had assumed an unhealthy intensity. There was madness in the impulse that swayed her. She was a prey to a kind of delirium. She saw herself persecuted by her rival, and she felt convinced that every misfortune which could now strike her would come through Lise.

And, in her badly-balanced brain, for a long time she revolved vague projects, of which the most innocent was yet frightful. Nothing precise as regarded action, but the idea very clear and very decided of getting rid of that girl, whose blue orbs had perhaps

cast the evil eye at her, as, since her appearance at the theatre, nothing had succeeded with Clémence. She did not, for one second, dream of admitting that Lise might owe her success as an *artiste* to her talent, and her success as a woman to her charms. There was witchcraft in this perpetual good fortune, which caused her to triumph, and to steal from her rival, at the same time, admiration and love.

The door had just re-opened. Clémence rose, and, upon the tips of her toes, she drew near and listened. These three words, "Till this evening," murmured in a very low tone, as if the mouth which pronounced them was touching the ear which listened to them, reached her, then the stealthy and soft sound of a kiss. The door was again closed, the step of Jean glided over the floor, and the Italian, henceforth sure of that which before she had only suspected, returned to her dressing-room, her heart oppressed and her brow heavy.

Jean, radiant, light as a bird, had, without encountering any obstacle, regained the stage, and there he began to talk, receiving with a careless air the compliments paid to him. The entrance of Lise sent him away. The position was difficult to him. He did not wish to avoid her, but it seemed to him impossible to approach her before everyone. He

went back into the body of the house with Raynaud and Doctor Panseron. As they took their places, the three blows were struck.

The fourth act of *La Duchesse* is very short. It is crammed with striking situations, and is terminated by the famous pistol scene, an exact reproduction of a recent Parisian drama, in which a slighted mistress fires upon her happy rival. The scene, very hazardous, had been arranged at rehearsals with extreme care. The pistol shot being fired with the muzzle almost touching, great precision of action was necessary. One step more might cause a frightful catastrophe.

Experiments had been made on the stage, to determine the exact distance at which the two actresses, Clémence and Lise, must stand. The corner of a table served as the spot fixed for one, and an arm-chair marked the place of the other. Every evening Roberval himself arranged those pieces of furniture, so as to be certain of his part of the work. Under these circumstances, Clémence could boldly draw the trigger. The grains of burning powder could not reach as far as Lise. As a further precaution, the actress slightly raised her arm, and the shot was fired in the air.

During a hundred representations the scene had

Bernard has no occasion to applaud: it is the public which gives the signal!"

Silence was restored, profound; there was no longer a murmur, and the words of the *artistes* could be distinctly heard in the *coulisses*. The pistol scene was beginning. Lise and Clémence were face to face, in a thrilling situation, rivals upon the stage as they were in the world, and expressing freely, in their fiery rejoinders, the hatred which they felt for each other. Proud and daring, Lise overwhelmed her enemy with her scornful pity; Clémence, maddened by jealousy, raged with anger, and, by gradations, arrived at the thought of murder.

Her looks were terrible, as she experienced in reality all the passions that she had to represent. Her mouth writhed in a cruel laugh, and, from between her clenched teeth, hissed envenomed words. Her features, drawn and contracted, gave to her countenance a frightful expression; her lips were livid, and her face had become the colour of ashes. The sentences in her *rôle* came to her mechanically. She no longer knew what she did, nor what she said, acting as if in a nightmare, and fixing upon Lise glances which longed for the power to slay.

That woman who stood before her was the person whom she execrated in the play; she was also the

being whom she abhorred in real life. And, her actual hatred augmenting her fictitious hatred, she dreamed of striking Lise in a double manner, in order to carry out her part and to yield to her abhorrence. She had drawn back upon herself, like a tiger lying in wait for its prey. A fixed idea haunted her, that of the eyes of Lise which had surely brought her misfortune.

She had them there, before her, wide open, mild and luminous, those eyes which made Lise adored! Oh! To close them for ever, to extinguish them, to destroy them! To annihilate, at the same time, the woman and the actress, to get rid of both of them, and to devote her to the most atrocious end: to bury in shadow, and very soon in oblivion, that career which began so brilliantly and so happily!

She broke out into an ominous laugh, which made the spectators tremble. The scene was at its culminating point. Yet another second, and Clémence would fire. She held, in her hand, beneath her mantle, the but-end of the revolver. Oh! if it had been loaded, and if she could have lodged a ball in the heart of Lise! But she was powerless, and that wretch would continue to persecute her. Those blue eyes would pursue her always with their fascinating glance. She was seized by a transport of

fury; she determined never more to see them, and, within herself, she exclaimed, "Thou shalt close them!"

She hurled back her reply; then, at the precise moment when the situation demanded it, she stepped forward, going beyond the table which served as her boundary, and, stretching out her arm to its full length, almost touching her rival with the muzzle, she took aim at her head and fired. A flame surrounded the brow of Lise; she uttered a terrible scream, raised her hands to her face, and, taking two steps backwards, she fell suddenly to the ground.

The entire house rose, in unspeakable agitation: from all parts exclamations crossed each other. Clémence, motionless, leaning upon the table, her glance troubled, stood before her rival as if deprived of consciousness, and presented the image of stupor. In the twinkling of an eye, Desmazures and Mortagne had rushed forward, and in their arms they bore off Lise, swooning; whilst Roberval, to hide from the public the spectacle of the disorder produced upon the stage, called, in a resounding voice, "The curtain!"

Rombaud had seen nothing, but the voice in which Clémence played the last part of the act, had sounded sinister to his ear. He said to himself, "She

has killed Lise." And, whilst the young woman was carried to her dressing-room, without replying to de Brives, who, pale as the dead, arrived upon the scene with the doctor, he seized Clémence by the wrist and hurried her into his cabinet. She appeared prostrated, and as if dazed: he cast a significant glance at her and said—

"You will await me here. Do not try to leave: I imprison you! And then, you know, the Commissaire of Police is within two paces!"

She raised her head. A sardonic smile contracted her mouth; she shrugged her shoulders and sat down without answering. Rombaud climbed the stairs four steps at a time, reached the corridor of the dressing-rooms, which was obstructed by the whole staff of the theatre, and announced himself by this apostrophe—

"Give me the pleasure all of you, of showing me your heels!"

The place was cleared as if by magic, and Rombaud found himself face to face with Jean, who was coming out of Lise's dressing-room, still agitated, but joy in his glance. . . .

"Well?" said Rombaud, forgetting his rancour in his trouble, and speaking to the young man for the first time that evening.

"It is a perfect miracle," said Jean. "She has only one or two burns on the forehead. . . ."

"But her eyes?" asked the manager.

"Untouched, except a few eyelashes."

Rombaud drew a long breath, as if his chest had been relieved from a crushing weight, and, smiling with all his irony regained, he asked de Brives—

"Can one go in?"

The door opened, and, on the small sofa, Lise extended, her head raised upon cushions, her forehead red in spots, the fair waves of her hair, which fell curling and silky above her eyebrows, burnt and singed, appeared to Rombaud. The doctor stood by her, gazing at her with emotion, and holding her hand.

"We shall get off with the fright," said he. "But an inch lower, and she would have had her eyes scorched by the flash. . . . She will have, however, one or two blue marks upon her forehead. A few grains of powder have stung her, and will leave a trace. . . . She will look as if she has been in the wars," added he laughingly. "But with some little curls, when her hair has grown again, she will hide her glorious scars!"

"It is that confounded trigger of the revolver,"

said Roberval in the corridor. "What a stupid idea it was to have it eased! It went off before Mademoiselle Villa wished! . . ."

"It is probable," said Rombaud, with *sang-froid*. . . .

"Well! Lise, are you better?" asked Massol, putting his head through the half-open door. . . . "*Dites donc, mon enfant*, the public is calling for you loudly, and will break everything unless we can give news of you."

"I will go," said Lise, who made an effort and raised herself.

"Presently, *ma chère*," said the doctor. "Do not let us abuse our strength!"

"We will issue a bulletin," said Rombaud.

And, leaving the room, he took away everybody. Jean and Lise remained alone. The young man caught her in his arms. All the horrible agitation that he had felt melting into a profound joy, his nerves gave way, and he began to weep silently. Lise took his head and supported it upon her shoulder; she spoke gently in his ear, happy to see that tall, energetic, and resolute fellow, prove so weak before the danger that she had incurred.

"I had only one fear, do you know," murmured she, "it was not to see you again. . . ."

She shuddered in spite of herself, again overcome by emotion, and now estimating the peril—

"Oh, the eyes! the eyes! The most precious things in this world! Think what a misfortune: To be blind! I, who have already my poor mother who cannot see! What would have become of me? Who would have taken charge of me? I must have had some one to lead me. And you, you would no more have loved me. . . ."

As Jean protested, clasping her to his heart—

"Yes, you are good, you would have had pity on me, you would not have abandoned me brusquely. . . . But you would grow weary. And then I should have been too miserable, and I should have died."

They clung to each other closely entwined, as if to shield themselves against that fearful destiny. Lise had not one word of reproach for Clémence. She wished to see only an unlucky chance in the accident of which she had been the victim. And, having recovered her strength, she descended to the stage.

Jean let her go, and, speaking to the property-man, who was passing, he asked him if he knew where M. Rombaud was.

"He has just entered his cabinet. He is there with Mademoiselle Villa."

"Thanks," said Jean.

Pursued by the sound of the acclamations of the public, before whom Lise had appeared, he walked towards the manager's cabinet.

Left alone, Clémence at first remained motionless, her eyes closed, as if sleeping. Her body was weighed down, but her mind was alert and lucid. She measured the consequences of the deed she had accomplished, and asked herself if they could prove her culpability. How could they believe that she had struck Lise wilfully? It would always be easy to deny. All the hypocritical protestations that she had lavished on the young girl, in the last few days, would be of use to her. In the theatre, there were twenty people who could bear witness in her favour. This cruel accident was, and could only be imputed to an inexplicable fatality. To everybody it would be deplorable ill-luck, but not even imprudence on the part of Clémence.

She again saw Lise, her brow surrounded by fire, falling at her feet. She heard the horrible scream that she had given. And an expression of joy animated her face. This time her vengeance was complete. She had put an end to those eyes, as blue as the heavens, that she hated so terribly. They were covered with blood and swollen, deprived of their gentle glance, deprived of their fascinating charm.

What was death, of which she had often dreamed for Lise, compared to the appalling torment to which she had condemned her? Her art, that she adored, she must renounce. Her lover, whose first kisses were still upon her lips, would shrink from her with horror.

Rombaud did not return. The time seemed long to her; she wished to know what was passing. She listened, and dull sounds reached her ears. Above her head she heard them walking hurriedly. Everything in the theatre appeared in motion. The situation must be excessively grave. She shuddered. A new thought passed through her brain. Had chance served her too well, and had she killed Lise? A slight perspiration moistened her brow, and her throat contracted.

She rose and walked up and down in the cabinet. Her prostration had ceased, and her nerves, strained by anxiety, gave her fresh vigour. The waiting was insupportable to her. She desired to go out, and she turned the handle of the door: the lock resisted. She remembered that Rombaud had told her that he should imprison her. She uttered a cry of rage. "What will he do with me?" she asked herself. In her embittered heart doubts began to penetrate. She felt no longer sure of being able to prove her

innocence. A prey to violent irritation, she began to walk round the room which served as her prison, like a wild beast in a cage. Time glided on. And she racked her brains in trying to discover what was passing. The well-known sound of Rombaud's bunch of keys was heard. At last some one was coming to her. She strengthened her will, and made her face impassible.

Without breathing a word, Rombaud crossed the room. He took off his hat, which he brusquely placed on the table, and stopped at a little distance from Clémence, gazing at her. Within himself he was thinking, "I must penetrate to the bottom of that tortuous conscience."

Incapable of controlling herself, Clémence could not wait till Rombaud spoke, so as to discover from the tone of his voice, by the form of his sentence, what she had to fear or to hope.

"Well!" cried she, betraying her anxiety. "Why do you look at me thus, without saying anything?"

"I am asking myself," replied Rombaud, with firmness, "what I am to do with you, for, in truth, you are a frightful creature!"

Clémence was not prepared for so rude an attack. She lost countenance.

"Do you suspect me," cried she, "of having done voluntarily . . that which has happened?"

She dared not specify the deed, nor pronounce the name of Lise.

"*Parbleu!*" replied Rombaud. And, as she made an indignant gesture, "Oh! do not deny it!" continued he, with energy. . . "I did not see you. . . I do not know how you did it, but I heard you, and you had murder in your voice. . . It was sufficient to hear you, to be sure that you wished to rid yourself of Lise. . ."

She affected not to take what he was saying, seriously—

"With a pistol which was not loaded?" said she, sneering. . . . "To whom could you tell such a tale? Who would believe it?"

"Oh! Let us understand each other!" resumed he. . . . "It was not your intention to kill that poor child. That would have been at the same time dangerous and useless. . . . You are too clever not to have realised this. . . But you were sure of disfiguring her. . . That is what you wished. . . ."

These words enlightened Clémence. She thought, "She is living; I have only blinded her."

"Why do you accuse me?" said she, regarding

Rombaud with audacity. "By what right do you favour me with such wicked thoughts? Why, without knowing, without having seen—it is you who have just said so—do you enrol yourself against me? I believed you to be my friend!"

"I should not be your friend if I spoke to you otherwise; I should be your accomplice. And what you have done alienates me for ever from you. . . How had she offended you, that gentle and innocent girl? You disliked her because she was young, because she had talent, and because she was loved! It is her superiority over you that you wished to punish. And in the most atrocious and the most cowardly fashion! It would have been better to stab her with a knife. . . There would have been, at least, some risk to run. She would have been able to defend herself, to call for assistance; but there, as if lying in wait, with that horrible *sang-froid*, and with the conviction that you had nothing to fear! . . It is, in truth, monstrous!"

Each of these words had inflicted a wound upon Clémence. She saw herself completely read by Rombaud, and she was again seized by her fears. But she still determined to lie, and to brazen it out!

"You are mad!" exclaimed she, in a broken voice; "or, rather, you are too adroit! With what

design are you trying to render me responsible for an accident which might have happened to anyone?"

She darted at him a venomous glance.

"Do you hope by chance to frighten me, and to make me pay for your silence? Oh! I believe you quite capable of it!"

Rombaud was stupefied. He had not foreseen so much wickedness. Profiting by her advantage, Clémence continued, with energy—

"Oh! I will not suffer you to insult me thus, so gratuitously! . . If you are sure of all that you assert, repeat it publicly. But I will not give you time to tutor your *employés*, and to influence their opinion. . . Let us go upon the stage directly, and take the evidence of all those who were present. We shall see if there will be anyone mad enough, or bold enough, to accuse me!"

"There will be myself!" said a firm voice behind her.

She turned, as if she had been struck, and recoiled on seeing before her Jean de Brives.

"You?" exclaimed she, feeling a violent shock.

"Yes, I, who saw you. And I defy you to deny it in my presence."

He gazed at her fixedly, and she could not support the fire in his eyes. She felt driven into a

corner, powerless to defend herself. Jean could not but suspect the motive which had incited her to act. He knew how the horrible thought was born in her mind. She remembered the evening when she had desired to take him away with her in her carriage; she heard him answer, "No!" She was ashamed to humble herself before him. To appear to argue, to seem to ask indulgence, when, devoured by rage, she had a longing to strike again and to insult! A ferocious pride in her crime swelled her heart, and, forgetting all prudence, her eyes flashing with fury, and her lips trembling—

"Well! Yes," cried she, "it is true! I wished to strike her, and I have struck her! And if I could have killed her, she would be dead! For I hate her with all the powers of my being! Never will she suffer enough for all that she has caused me to suffer!"

That savage outburst of rage made the two men tremble. Before that woman, beside herself, her face distorted, her eyes blazing, they remained speechless! She, marching upon them, braving them with her glance and menacing them with her gestures, foaming, on the verge of madness—

"Well! For what are you waiting? . . .

Denounce me. I confess it. I fear nothing, neither prison nor justice! All that I have to endure will be sweet to me, as I know that I have made the other pay for it in advance! Oh! oh! yes, indeed, I hate her, that favoured one, who had only to appear in order to succeed and to please; who has, in one instant, gained all the homage and obtained all the triumphs! No difficulties for her, no efforts, no struggle against evil temptations, no hand-to-hand fight with poverty! A road sown with flowers, and no crumple amongst her rose-leaves! And all that, because she had an innocent face and a caressing voice. . . . Seek it now, the face! Hear it groan, the voice! . . ."

She burst into a dismal laugh, which ended in a cry of terror. Jean had sprung towards her, disgusted, seized with a mad desire to crush her, to force her to keep silence. He threw her down so roughly that her knees sounded on the floor. . .

"Wretch!" cried he, in a choked voice, his clenched fist raised, ready to strike her.

She did not try to escape nor to defend herself. She caught the young man in her arms, clasping him to her bosom in an impassioned embrace. A burning colour mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes were humid—

"Jean! it is because I love you that I did all this!" cried she.

"And I, it is because you have done all this that I execrate you!"

He repulsed her with horror. She remained in the same spot, bowed before him, humbly. That *blasée* in love experienced a profound emotion. She saw in Jean her veritable master. Never had she loved him so much as when feeling herself in his hands, scorched by the fire of his eyes, submitting to his violence, abused as she had not been for ten years. She was upon the point of crying to him, "Strike me again! You give me pleasure!"

He had withdrawn from her, savage, avoiding to look at her. Rombaud raised her. He placed her in a chair.

"She is a woman," said he, "however atrocious she may be!"

"Well! take her away!" said Jean, with an angry gesture. "If she speaks again as she has just done, I do not answer for myself!"

"First of all," said Rombaud, gravely, "we must punish her as she deserves."

He walked towards the door, opened it, and went out for a moment. Clémence watched him leave the

room, asking herself how he intended to punish. Perhaps he was going to seek all her comrades. She saw herself alone with Jean; she had an idea of throwing herself at his feet, of entreating him not to turn away from her as he was doing. She cast a glance at him which implored a word less insulting. She read disgust upon his face, and, breathing a deep sigh, she remained silent. Rombaud re-entered. He walked up and down for a moment, seeming to reflect; then, addressing himself to Clémence—

"I pity you," said he, "and then I wish to avoid a scandal, which would recoil upon the innocent. Fatality, as you have said, shall therefore be, to all the world, except to ourselves, the only culprit. . . . But you must also do something for yourself. . . . Try to simulate a little contrition. . . . Poor Lise is very far from suspecting that you have wilfully done her so much evil. . . . The mind of that child must not be embittered by such a thought. It is therefore necessary that you should express to her your regret, and that you should openly show her your sorrow. I have had her called. . . ."

He exchanged a rapid glance with Jean.

At the thought of finding herself with Lise, of seeing her victim, Clémence, aghast, had risen to her

feet; overwhelmed by sudden horror, she sought an outlet by which to escape.

"No! no!" exclaimed she. "I will not let her come! . . . Not before you! At least not before him! . . ."

She feared that Jean would give way to some terrible manifestation of despair. And she rebelled, she would not submit to that confrontation which would enable her to witness her work. She rushed towards the door, hoping to have time to fly, to gain her dressing-room.

The door opened before she had touched it, and, with stupor, she saw Lise, who moved forward, regarding her mildly with her beautiful, wide-open, blue eyes. She recoiled, as at the sight of a spectre, uttered an exclamation, and dropped upon a chair, her face buried in her hands, crushed by shame at having been deceived, overwhelmed by regret at having confessed, and consumed by despair at being, yet once more, vanquished by her rival.

"Do not weep Clémence," said Lise, who, in her innocence, believed that her enemy was shedding tears, when it was only the disappointment caused by her abortive crime. "Now! I beg you calm your emotion, and come, kiss me! . . ."

Clémence lowered her hands and showed a counte-

nance of marble. She rose, and with a terrible pang at the heart, saw Lise offer to her lips the brow that she had so cruelly attacked. She pressed a kiss upon it with effort. And, as if subjugated by the threatening glance cast at her by Jean, she articulated in a hollow voice—

"Forgive me. . . ."

"Oh! with my whole heart. The more so as I believe the fault is Roberval's, who had that hateful revolver too well arranged. . . . We shall play no more pieces with pistol scenes, shall we, Monsieur Rombaud?" said she playfully. And, in her turn, throwing her arms around the neck of Clémence, she gave her two kisses, the purest that this infernal woman had received since she had lost her mother.

"Now! adieu!" said she. "We shall not play our fifth act this evening: there is no longer anyone in the house. . . ."

She made a sign to Jean, and went out with him. Clémence did not stir. She was thinking. Thus she had been mystified. Rombaud's menaces were feigned. His aim had been to humiliate her, before Lise, in the eyes of Jean. At that thought she became violently exasperated. She rose, and, going towards him—

"It seems that it does not suffice to you to make

others act a comedy," said she, with irony. "You still act one, from time to time, yourself! I compliment you; your little *coup-de-théâtre* was very well contrived. And I was taken in by it."

"Listen, Clémence," said Rombaud, gravely. "I desired to make you see plainly the consequences that your frightful action might have brought about. . . . Because it was not as serious as you hoped, you must not look upon yourself as innocent in my eyes. And, if ever the intention could be regarded as the act, it is in the present case. . . . You must swear to me . . . Upon what? . . . Indeed, what is there that is sacred to you?"

"To swear what?" said the Italian coldly. "Not to begin again?"

"Certainly! . . . Or . . ."

"Do not threaten!" exclaimed she. . . . "It would be surely useless, and perhaps dangerous."

She collected her thoughts before continuing—

"I committed a great imprudence this evening . . . and I reproach myself bitterly for it. I had ten ways better than that which I employed for ruining Lise. . . . But, what will you? One cannot always command one's nerves. . . ."

"I do not find you as I had hoped . . . after so rough a lesson," said Rombaud. . . . "You

ought to be, if not repentant, at least pacified. . . . There is nothing of the kind; your anger is persistent. I must therefore take it in hand. You once called upon me to choose between Lise and yourself. . . . Well, if you are determined to be a perpetual cause of torment to that poor girl. . . . I prefer that you should leave. . . ."

"Have you a hundred thousand francs to give me for your breach of contract?" said she, leaning her two hands upon the bureau of the manager. "No! Well then, what good is it to talk? I shall not leave the theatre. . . . But you may sleep in peace. . . . I shall trouble myself no more about Lise, nor about Jean. . . . Another will charge himself with the task. . . . And him, no one opposes. . . . He is the master of us all! . . ."

"Nuño?" hazarded Rombaud.

"If you are asked, you will say that you know nothing of it! . . ."

She had again become daring. She placed herself before him, and, in a peremptory voice—

"But now! once for all, between you and myself, is it peace or war?"

Rombaud shivered slightly. That woman, with a pale complexion, gloomy eyes, cruel lips, alarmed him. Could he afford to make her an implacable

enemy? He knew of what she was capable. He was not yet in a position to let loose upon himself so dangerous a hatred. He thought of his future, and resolved to sacrifice his repugnances to it. He smoothed his brow and softened his glance.

"Is it possible for us to be enemies?" said he. "There are, in the past, too many solid bonds which attach us to each other. But, indeed, listen to me: you have caused me much suffering."

He was moved, speaking with his southern sensibility. She looked at him curiously.

"Then, it is over!" said she. "We have both been equally stupid, do you see, *mon vieux* Francisque. . . *Nous nous sommes emballés* . . I in anger, you in severity. . . Let us forget all that."

She walked towards the door, and, chatting, as if nothing of a tragical nature had passed between them—

"I start at the end of the week for Trouville. . . . Shall we see you? You know that there is always a room for you in the house. . . ."

He led her back as far as the staircase. They clasped hands. And she ascended to her dressing-room with a tranquil step; he, asking himself what could indeed be passing, at this moment, in that

heart devoured by rancour; she, promising herself a terrible revenge for the humiliation that she had just undergone.

## CHAPTER II.

THE days which followed that dramatic evening, were to Lise and Jean, the happiest of their lives. Freed from every impediment, from every care they were all in all to each other and enjoyed it exquisitely. Lise went again to the apartments in the Rue Taitbout, filled for her with sad and happy souvenirs, each of which seemed to her equally precious, as Jean was mixed up in them. She liked, when mounting the stairs, to recall to mind the terrible emotion which had agitated her the first time, when she had paused upon the landing, and when it became necessary to ring. She delighted in awaiting Jean, quite alone, in the small salon with red silk blinds, through which the softened light streamed, rose-coloured, giving to that room, furnished with elegant simplicity, a character of meditative and dreamy gravity.

She waited half-lying, in the silence, her eyes attracted by the glitter of some enamel, or of some piece of brass-work touched by the light, hearing the voice of him whom she adored, sing in her heart. Those moments of solitude in Jean's apartments, in the midst of all that surrounded him every day, were so sweet to Lise that, to procure them, she anticipated the hour of their *rendez-vous*. She prepared herself for the delight of seeing Jean, by going there to dream of him. She went into a kind of retreat for love. And when she heard the step of the young man, that she could recognise at a distance, rapidly ascending the stairs, her strained and vibrating nerves thrilled deliciously. She lay in wait for him behind the door, opening it before he could put in his key, and, in the dim light of the antechamber, springing upon his neck, she suffocated him with her kisses.

At five o'clock every day, Lise left Jean in order to return to her home. She was never later. For nothing in the world, would she have allowed her mother to suspect the truth. And yet, notwithstanding all the precautions that she took to deceive the blind woman, the latter had suspicions. The darkness which encompassed her had for her a peculiar clearness. She had made for herself an inner

sight extremely penetrating. She translated all the movements of her daughter, and even interpreted her silence.

Every evening she took her head between her hands, and felt about her face, as if she would decipher her thoughts from the expression of her features. Lise lent herself to that maternal inquisition. She remained bending, her fair hair spread over the knees of the blind woman, addressing to herself violent reproaches, accusing herself of neglecting her, and of stealing from her a portion of that tenderness rendered more precious to her by her affliction. *La mère* Fleuron, her eyes fixed on vacancy, passing her thin fingers over the brow of her whom she was no longer the only one to caress, slowly shook her head.

"I do not know what is the matter with you," said she. "You are altogether changed. . . . It is that wicked life at the theatre. . . . You have cut off the curls from your forehead. . . . Is it the fashion to dress the hair otherwise?"

And Lise shivered slightly, at the recollection of the horrible adventure that she had carefully concealed from her mother.

"You, who never stirred from the house," continued the blind woman, "you are now abroad the

whole day. . . . When you go out, you run, like a horse escaping. . . . When you return, you walk slowly, almost as with regret. . . . What does all this mean?"

"Nothing, Mamma. . . . I am preparing for the performance that I am to give at Evreux. . . . We shall go soon, you know. . . . The change of air will do you good. . . ."

And she rocked her like a child. But the blind woman became more gloomy—

"Even your way of embracing is no longer the same as of old! . . . Lise there is vice under this!"

And Lise, quite pale, rose, saying—

"Mamma, what you say is wrong. . . . You are unkind! . . ."

Then, incapable of continuing severe, she returned, and compelled herself to tranquillise her, to divert her thoughts, and to restore her security of mind, the sole thing that she could have. Yet, seized with a desire to open her heart, to spread abroad the fulness of joy that it contained, she ventured one day to say to her mother—

"And if I loved anyone?"

The blind woman threw her head back, trying to pierce the film which darkened her eyes, and to see her daughter.

"Oh! it is a long time that I have suspected that!" cried she, bursting into tears. "You could not hide it from me! . . . One does not change as you have done, without some terrible reason! . . . Besides, when you wished to 'take to' the theatre, I deemed you lost. . . . Can anything honest exist in the midst of that corruption? . . . It is ended for me. . . . And I indeed see that my life has lasted too long!"

Lise, dismayed, tried to put her mother on a wrong scent. She affected to joke. She acted the comedy of indifference. Her heart was free. *Certes*, it was not at the theatre that she would go to seek the man whom she could love; and her mother was quite right. She had merely spoken to try her, and she sincerely regretted it, on seeing how much pain it had caused her.

She redoubled her cares, her tendernesses, but, in spite of all, the blind woman remained distrustful. She had now a fixed idea which, in the dark chamber of her brain, she turned and re-turned incessantly. She was always on the watch, hoping to surprise some indication which would permit her to arrive at certainty. She showed herself exacting, easily taking umbrage, and made life very hard to her daughter. The latter bore everything as a just

punishment, sacrificed Jean to her mother, and did not swerve for one single instant from her angelic patience.

She set out for Evreux, only at the epoch fixed. And, laden with parcels, harassed by her mother with questions, with objections, with complaints, throughout the whole duration of the journey, she arrived at last at her aunt's house, where she could a little escape from her filial slavery.

If she was disposed to accept anything from the poor woman, she was not in the humour for showing patience to the gossips of the town. To her mother, she consented to be always a little girl. But to indifferent people, she well knew how to exhibit herself as the successful *artiste*, a woman sure of her position, who would not countenance the encroaching familiarities of the country. She went to the Mayor to make arrangements for the representation, she called on the *Préfet*, who had been of assistance to her, and overwhelmed these two functionaries by her grace.

Two days after her arrival, the walls of the town were covered with placards announcing a grand performance given for the benefit of the poor, "with the co-operation of Mademoiselle Lise Fleuron, *ex-pensionnaire* of the Department; of

MM. Desmazures, Mortagne, and Pavilly; of M. and Madame Malavielle of the Théâtre-Moderne." The programme was novel in its variety: it included *L'Été de la Saint-Martin*, the fifth act of *Ruy Blas*, *La Nuit d'Octobre*, *Les Convictions de Papa*, and half-a-dozen monologues. Lise must show herself in four strikingly dissimilar *rôles*—*naïve* and loving in the play of Meilhac and Halévy, vigorous and thrilling in Hugo's drama, sprightly and gay in Gondinet's comedy, melancholy and *suave* in the reverie of Musset. They had given good measure to the inhabitants of Evreux, and there was something for every taste.

The comrades of Lise had responded with alacrity to her appeal. And, beside the principal actors from Rombaud's company, could be seen conspicuous, in a line by themselves, M. and Madame Malavielle, good people who played utilities at the Théâtre-Moderne, and travelled through the provinces, during the holidays, in a carriage crammed with costumes and property, permitting them to place at the disposition of amateurs all that was necessary to act in dramas, comedies, pantomimes, vaudevilles, opera-comique, and even grand opera. They could mount, with equal facility, *La Reine Margot*, a drama in five acts and with ten tableaux, requiring

an enormous *mise en scène*, or *Les Jurons de Cadillac*, a comedy for two characters, which can be played between two screens.

They arrived in a town with their van, and rehearsals began, under the direction of M. Malavielle, a pupil of Achille Ricourt; whilst Madame Malavielle, expert in taking in and letting out, adjusted her ready-made costumes to the figures, portly or slender, of the amateurs in the neighbourhood. They also charged themselves with organising historic cavalcades, furnishing doublets, cuirasses, breast-plates, helmets, *cuissards*, plumed hats, lances, arquebuses, swords, down to cannon, and even the false gates of a town in painted canvas. They journeyed thus, from Department to Department, impatiently awaited by the joyous young people, having an assured connection; and going from the mercantile town, where the sons of the *bourgeoisie* dreamed of declaiming *Hernani* in fleshings, in the presence of their stupefied mothers and enamoured cousins, to the *seigneurial château*, where the aristocracy of the province amused themselves madly by singing, much out of tune, *La Fille de Madame Angot* or *La Mascotte*.

These good people travelled in this manner over the roads, the last survivors of the romance of

comedy, working one of the numerous veins of theatrical industry. It was they who had provided all the property and all the costumes for the fifth act of *Ruy Blas* and *La Nuit d'Octobre.* Madame Malavielle, clever at everything, on the evening of the performance, had installed herself in the booking office; whilst Malavielle, who vibrated like *feu Beauvallet*, had glided, playbooks in hand, into the box of the prompter.

Jean, arrived in the day, had established himself at the *Hôtel du Grand Cerf*, had dined like a happy man, without paying attention to what they served up to him, and, at half-past seven, he had obtained for the sum of fifteen francs, seven francs more than at the office, an excellent orchestra stall, of a speculative trader who, in imitation of Paris, had, since the morning, swept off the best places.

The house was already full, and the ladies of the town had arrayed themselves in their lightest bonnets and their longest gloves. The garrison had furnished the flower of its officers, and, from the surrounding *chateaux*, a few charming Parisians, sojourning in the country, had come to adorn the boxes with their quiet elegance. The band of the town, *La Lyre de l'Eure*, occupied the orchestra with its formidable wind instruments, and, in a corner, near the foot-

lights, its banner, from which it never separated, displayed its folds of embroidered velvet sown with medals.

Jean, lost in the crowd, completely unknown, amused himself like a student in the holidays. He made a success of the overture to *Zampa*, played by the band with an energy which puffed out the cheeks of the musicians like red balloons; he applauded Lise and her comrades, with hands, with feet, and with voice. He fancied himself at one of those performances at the Théâtre de la Tour d'Auvergne which had been the joy of his boyish days.

Lise, delighted to see him there, forgot herself, and gazed at him tenderly, making the stout major of the 37th, who was placed immediately before Jean, become crimson, and say to himself with proud emotion—

"*Crebleu !* but that little one ogled me !"

She was adorable. And, admirably seconded by her comrades, she paid in one single time to the town which had encouraged her dramatic vocation her tribute of gratitude. The house shook with the applause. The stage nearly gave way under the flowers. And, at one o'clock in the morning, the public, accustomed to retire to bed at eleven o'clock,

was still there, shouting loudly for monologues from Pavilly, and for poetry from Lise.

The receipts amounted to five thousand francs, the authors having beforehand abandoned their rights, and the town having gratuitously furnished the gas and the firemen. Thanks to Lise, the children of the poor were sure to have, throughout the winter, good soup and warm clothing. But the stout major, who, having tried to gain admittance behind the scenes, had come into collision with the inexorable Malavielle, was melancholy for at least three weeks, convinced that he had missed, through the fault of that "confounded, obstinate strolling-player," the most flattering adventure in his career of gallantry.

*La mère* Fleuron, installed with her sister, Madame Capelle, "*modes et lingerie*," and her *bonne*, in a small corner box, experienced the first gratification that her daughter had caused her since she had gone on the stage. She felt herself mildly flattered by the eulogistic murmur which arose from all sides. She asked herself with astonishment if till that time she had not been mistaken with regard to Lise, and if the actress, for whom she blushed, was not decidedly an important and much-respected person. She was amazed at the enthusiasm of the

public. She did not understand the sublime beauties of Hugo's drama, but, impressed by the passion of the verses, she melted into tears. She bitterly regretted not being able to see Lise, on hearing her *bonne* exclaim, in a breathless voice—

"Ah! madame, is it really possible that this is Mademoiselle? . . . *Mon Dieu*, I should not have known her, she is so beautiful!"

But the diversity of talent displayed by her daughter, during the representation, terrified her. She saw only in that art, skilful and versatile, the triumph of falsehood. She thought: "I can have no confidence in anything that she says to me. It is easy to her to appear calm or agitated, careless or sad. She can deceive me as she will."

She had an intuition of what was passing in the heart of Lise. She felt that her child was escaping from her. Her pleasure was poisoned by these reflections. She became gloomy, reserved, and welcomed Lise coldly, when, after the performance, she entered the box, her arms filled with bouquets and with wreaths, in quest of a compliment which would have been more precious to her than all the ovations of the crowd. The dumb hostility of her mother disquieted her, and she sorrowfully returned to her aunt's house, whilst all those who had been

enchanted by her that evening saw her still in thought, radiant, and *fêtée*.

Shut in in the small chamber which she occupied, on the *entresol*, she began to think of Jean. A step, rapid and light, treading the unequal pavement of the street, in the profound silence of the sleeping town, made her start. She drew aside her curtain, and, in the obscure doorway of the house, she recognised him whom she loved. With precaution she opened her window. He mounted upon the large stone which protected the entrance from the collision of carriage wheels; she seated herself on the window-sill. And they were near enough to clasp each other's hand. In a low voice, they began to talk. It seemed to them that it was a century since they had met. The air was mild, and the moon shrouding herself behind the clouds did not betray them. They remained there a long time, deliciously enjoying these moments of stolen happiness.

The clock of the cathedral struck three, and all the clocks of the public buildings in the town echoed it one after the other, but Lise had no thought of sending Jean from her. The streets were deserted; they were not afraid of being surprised by a belated passer. They did not hear the door of Lise's room open, and the stealthy step of *La mère* Fleuron glide

over the floor. The blind woman felt her way to the bed of her daughter, found it empty and cold, and uttered a hollow exclamation. Lise turned abruptly, saw her mother, wrung Jean's hand forcibly, cast at him a dismayed glance, and closed the window.

"You were there?" said the blind woman, breathing with relief. She at first thought that her daughter had gone out, quite alone, into Evreux.

"Yes, mamma," replied Lise. "I was enjoying the air. It is very hot here, and I cannot sleep."

The blind woman took her daughter by the shoulders, and passed her hand over her brow, which she found damp with prespiration—

"You are warm, it is true," said she, "but how do you know that you cannot sleep? You are still dressed; you have not gone to bed. . . . For more than an hour you have been there. . . ."

She regarded her daughter with her sightless eyes, and, shaking her head—

"Lise, you were not alone at your window. . ."

"Mamma!" cried Lise, with frightful anguish. . . . "Of what are you thinking?"

"It is in vain that you are clever in expressing the sentiments of others and in dissembling your own: you cannot deceive your mother. . . . To read your heart, I do not want to see clearly. . . .

You love some one! . . . And that love cannot be honest, as you conceal it from me. . . . It is some wretch from the theatre, who has turned your brain. . . . And he was here, without doubt prowling under your window, when I came, drawn by a presentiment. . . ." .

"No, mamma, I was alone. . . ."

"Do not tell a lie!" interrupted the blind woman, harshly. . . . "It is useless! When I saw you become an actress, I knew that you had left the straight path. . . . No innocence can withstand that profession. . . . You no longer speak a word of truth. . . . You are going to-morrow, you say, to pass a few days with a friend: I know now what that means. . . Ah! it is over I have now no daughter! . . ."

She began to weep noisily. Lise, overwhelmed, besought her mother, comforted her, entwined about her with a thousand caressing arguments, and ended by leading her back to her room. She made her lie down again, watched over her till she fell asleep, and, at the first glimmer of day, she was able herself to find a little repose.

Thus the prediction of La Barre began to be fulfilled, and Lise, born for the uniform tranquillity of a *vie bourgeoise*, found, in the passionate agitations

of her artistic life, a cruel torture. Frank and upright, she was compelled to deceive. Tender and good, she was held between the duties of her filial affection and the allurements of her love. She awoke profoundly sad, and was obliged to appear cheerful, to dissipate the suspicions of her mother. She announced that she would not leave yet, and, at the cost of this sacrifice, painfully won a smile from the blind woman. She wrote a long letter to Jean, to excuse herself, and told him that she would arrive at the end of the week.

Upon the hill which overhangs the road from Rueil to Marly, between Malmaison and Bougival, amongst verdure and flowers, Jean had hired a house, built of brick, with brown window-shutters, surrounded by a large garden, which is known in the country under the name of *Villa du Cœur Percé.* The house is flanked by a small, round tower, with a pointed roof surmounted by a weather-cock, in the form of a heart pierced by two arrows, which, ironical emblem, turns at every breath of wind. From this vane comes its designation. By way of abbreviation, the tradesmen of the neighbourhood, who daily carry provisions there, say *Le Cœur Percé.*

It is here that, on one lovely evening of July, Jean and Lise went to instal themselves, fully deter-

mined to hide their happiness, and to live, during a few weeks, exclusively for each other. The sun was sinking behind the rising ground of Saint-Germain, casting through the trees the crimson glare of a conflagration. The clouds, touched by his slanting rays, were a bright rose-colour; and, on the west, above the blazing disc, lighter tints, shading from primrose yellow to pale green, melted into the dark blue of the sky. At the foot of the hill, flowed the Seine, sparkling like a river of silver, between its green banks. Some purple rays, passing through the tall poplars which quivered over the low ground, stained the waters as with blood, and from the fields, with the evening, a fog rose in the air, bluish and light as the smoke of incense. The red roofs and the white walls of the village of Croissy enlivened the dark tones of the foliage, and the panes of glass in a few windows, touched by a last sunbeam, glittered, like a mysterious eye looking over the horizon. A solemn and meditative silence descended upon the country. The bell of a distant church rang for the Angelus. And the first melancholy stars shone in the azure heavens.

Jean, with Lise leaning on his arm, stood upon the terrace gazing at this spectacle. A delicious freshness rose from the river, and after the excessive

heat of the day, the revived flowers emitted a penetrating perfume. An exquisite torpor had taken possession of the two young people, and, silent, motionless, they abandoned themselves to the sweetness of life, of love, and of happiness.

The following day, rather late, Lise was awakened from her slumber by the birds singing in the trees. She opened her eyes, looked around her, and remained charmed in her large bed of white varnished wood with rose-coloured mouldings, gazing at her elegant and spacious room, lighted by two tall windows, hung with Louis XVI. *crétonne*, and furnished with neatness and taste by a merchant who had just realised here the dream of a whole life of labour, at the exact time when unlucky speculations prevented him from enjoying his costly folly. A carpet *de la savonnerie*, with a green pattern on a white ground, covered the floor; a charming set in *rocaille*, adorned the hearth, and the curtains of guipure, which draped the windows, having been made for the proprietor, bore his monogram in a medallion. The dressing-room, situated in the little tower, was hung with fine matting upheld by stems of bamboo, and dazzled the eyes by the lustre of its white marble, of its bevilled mirrors, of its flowery porcelain, of its cut-glass.

However, Lise, having heard Jean move in the adjoining room, sprang from her bed, passed her feet into small black satin slippers, threw on an embroidered *peignoir*, and, her fair hair arranged in a thick mass upon her head, in a graceful disorder, she opened her window and stepped out on the balcony. Jean went to her from his room. They met again with rapture, and, their hands clasped, side by side, with the sweet certainty of not having to part, they leaned their elbows on the balustrade, and, their hearts full, their minds at rest, they allowed their eyes to wander over the landscape.

The scene had changed. The sun was now high in the heavens, and the air was of exquisite transparency. At the foot of the hill, the Seine flowed peacefully, bearing on its bosom heavy barges with brown sides picked out with green, the enormous helm worked by a bargeman, who guided the action of the rudder. The trees on the banks mirrored themselves in the rippling current, reflecting in the water their sombre masses. On the left, above La Grenouillère, the bridge of the Ile de Croissy spanned the *bras mort* of the river, and, in the distance, the aqueduct at Marly reared its useless skeleton ravaged by the heavy rains. Opposite—beyond the fields, which exhibited their different

crops, variegated in colours, as a vast card of patterns, ploughed into furrows of a purple brown, standing corn of a golden yellow, oats of a grayish green tint, and lucerne of an emerald green—the roofs of Chatou rose amid the foliage. To the right, Nanterre and Rueil, and all along the road, dotted by houses with red roofs and green window-shutters, the steam tramway passed, breathing forth a white smoke. A dazzling light illumined this admirable landscape. And, before that wide expanse of country, their eyes fixed upon the distant horizon, Lise and Jean forgot themselves, lost in the immensity of the space.

At length they tore themselves from that contemplative ecstasy. They breakfasted, waited upon by Francis and by his wife, who was a *cordon bleu* of the first class. Then they minutely reviewed their domain. The garden, very narrow, descended in a slope to the road. The raised ground, carefully gravelled, which surrounded the house, was adorned by a basin, in the midst of which was a rock, the especial pride of the retired merchant. Over this rock, the water from a reservoir, constructed near the entrance gate, flowed in a cascade. A stone parapet stretched the whole length of the terrace, which was laid out in flower beds edged by turf, and filled with

beautiful flowers. At the two extremities, an arbour, overrun by Virginian creeper, with leaves already crimsoning, and a *kiosque*, sheltered from the wind by straw-matting artistically plaited, paved with black and white sandstone, and furnished with sofas and arm-chairs in wicker-work. A pavilion, looking into the street which passed by the heights of Bougival, and led to the woods of Louveciennes, contained, on the ground floor, a billiard-room, and, on the first storey, apartments for the servants. A dog-kennel, in carved wood, placed near the entrance gate, was bereft of its inmate.

This property, charming in its narrow proportions, greatly pleased them. It was new, cared-for, and pretty ; it made an admirable frame for their happiness. During a whole week, they lived there without once having a desire to leave that small garden which was filled by their *tête-à-tête*. They forgot all the world. The house and the terrace were the whole world to them. By their songs and their kisses they rivalled the birds. Like children, they amused themselves with delicious nothings, to which their love lent an unexpected charm. They enjoyed their passionate youth, and tasted inexpressible pleasures.

The heart of Jean, like a plant till that time deprived of air and light, and which blossoms in the

full rays of the sun, expanded beneath the glance of Lise. That calculator became improvident, that sceptic was *naïf*. He ceased to be on his guard against life, on seeing it so beautiful and so smiling. Lise, with profound joy, witnessed that transformation, that Jean made her comprehend. He related to her his past existence, without evasions and without reserve. He described to her the man that he had been, and she could compare him with the man that he now was.

That adventurer of Paris, whose sole pre-occupation had been the conquest of wealth, and who was withering in the covetous projects of ambition, recovered with transport, the ingenuous beliefs of his twentieth year, and the full freshness of his disdained youth. He enjoyed its pleasures with the wisdom of maturity. He said merrily to Lise—

"Like a miser, I was economising the best days of my life; you came, you broke open the money-box, and we will devour my savings together."

And she laughed, showing such white teeth that he regretted not having more to offer her to eat.

However, Lise regained her fears, on discovering the adventurous boldness of Jean's desires. She wished to persuade him to forsake gambling. She saw too many perils for him in those rash enterprises.

He might succeed for a long time, have many years of perfect good fortune, and then, suddenly, commence a series of reverses. The gain had been slow and painful, but the loss would be rapid and stupefying. God knows, down that slippery descent, how difficult it was to stop. Those alone who were propped up by an enormous capital, could without fear brave the dangers of speculation. If they were entangled in an unlucky affair, they had leisure to wait till fortune should become favourable. But Jean had but one single stake to risk. And he was condemned to succeed always. If not. . . .

One day she asked him what he would do, if ever, involved in a disastrous speculation, it would be impossible to discharge his obligations. He answered with confidence—

"That cannot happen. I am too prudent, and I only venture after those more shrewd than myself."

And as she persisted saying, "But the most skilful and the most clever are deceived, and if you should be drawn in, you also?" he knit his brows; his blue eyes became cold and hard as steel; and, in a clear voice, he let drop these words which quite unhinged Lise—

"I should imitate the sailors who will not lower their flag. I should blow up my ship."

That night Lise slept badly. Her slumber was haunted by frightful dreams. She saw Jean, pale and wild-looking, a pistol in his hand, preparing to destroy himself, to avoid the fatal consequences of a hazardous speculation. She tried to throw herself upon him, to prevent him from executing his horrible design. But an invincible power restrained her, and, with terror, she saw him put the pistol to his forehead. There was a ringing detonation, and, in a cloud of smoke, the body of Jean fell heavily to the ground.

She awoke, her hair drenched with perspiration, and, in the silence, she listened, asking herself if she would not hear a grievous moaning. She opened her troubled eyes and saw Jean who was sleeping peacefully, and smiling at a happy dream. She was reassured, pressed a light kiss upon his forehead, and endeavoured to sleep again. She could not, and remained a prey to terrible thoughts.

Lise dared not confide her disquietudes to Jean; she feared by telling him all, to displease him and to estrange him. For, now, he unfolded to her his plans, and grew animated in pointing out the results that he expected from them. He had been taken by Nuño into the secret of a colossal speculation, relating to shares in the copper mines of Bénagoa,

in Portugal, in which millions could be gained. The English were the grantees, and all the world knows with what practical ability they make the most of a speculation. Sélim had monopolised a great quantity of the shares, and he waited before throwing them into the market, till a dividend that promised to be superb, was distributed. There would be an enormous rise, and, in a few weeks, Jean, who followed the combinations of the banker, must realise a considerable sum.

At that thought he became elated, his figure seemed to grow taller, and his eyes sparkled, as if they were filled with a reflection of the anticipated gold. He had the fever of speculation, the frenzy of gain, the monstrous ambition of enriching himself rapidly, without sustained effort, without long-continued anxiety, in a lightning-like fashion, as in a fairy transformation scene. And Lise, trembling, dared not speak, for contradiction excited him, and, with a restless ardour, he went beyond the most satisfactory realities, seeking the astounding, the visionary, the impossible.

More than ever she dreaded Nuño. She had before her eyes the smile of the Portuguese. She heard him say to her, "Distrust ineligible young men!" And she felt in the depth of her being

that the man who had desired her, who had made her proposals so little disguised, could not but hate Jean. She would not, for an empire, give to him whom she loved the reasons for her want of confidence. But she tried to put him on his guard against the banker. Then he, smiling, took her in his arms and closed her lips with a kiss. This was an argument which she never resisted. And, restored to serenity, she forgot her anguish, adjourning her counsels to the moment when they might be useful, and reproaching herself for bringing, out of mere wantonness, black clouds into their beautiful sky.

Yet Jean did not tell all to Lise. And, if she was anxious about him, he was equally anxious about her. The recollection of Clémence often came to him, sombre and menacing. He remembered her sudden burst of rage on that terrible evening, and her confession of hatred. He dreamed of sheltering Lise from the attempts of her enemy, by making her cancel her engagement. He would pay her forfeiture, and would withdraw her from the theatre. That amiable girl, elegant or simple at will, bending to all the circumstances of life, would be the most charming companion. Why leave her exposed to the many dangers reserved for her by the theatre?

He now felt a secret dissatisfaction at the

thought that an actor, young and handsome, burning with ardent passion, should every evening take Lise into his arms, while stammering words of love in an intoxicated voice. That unwholesome excitement of the stage, incessantly renewed, might trouble the best-balanced minds. And then, there was Nuño, and all the others whom he knew, without speaking of those whom he did not know, who would try to rob him of Lise.

He knew what was the ordinary progress of those *liaisons* which begin passionately with a vow of eternal fidelity. At the end of a year or two, weariness supervenes; other desires spring up in the heart; ambitions, skilfully excited, speak imperiously; and a new lover, young or old, handsome or rich, takes the place of him who was to have been adored to the last breath. He knew what were the facilities of the dramatic world. He had made use of them: why should not another make use of them against himself? Truly he had confidence in Lise, but, in that atmosphere of the *coulisses*, in time all became tainted, and he would prefer not to run the risk.

They walked out now every day, ascending by the upper road, to the woods which crown the table-land; lingering to wander through the deserted

alleys, breathing the fragrant odours of the grasses, and hearing, in the dense underwood, the melancholy note of the cuckoo, that mysterious bird which one can never see fluttering among the branches. Or, opening the small door pierced through the garden wall, they descended by a steep lane to the banks of the river, and, loosening the boat, fastened to a tarred stake, they drifted with the current, enjoying the coolness of the stream.

They stopped under the willows to watch the little *gamins*, who were bathing quite naked, like a tribe of savages in miniature, their rosy flesh shining against the green background of the fields, and their joyous shouts ascending to the sky in a cloud of spray struck from the water by their turbulent hands. They remained there, solitary, observed curiously, beneath their screen of trembling leaves, by the boating men in coloured jerseys who passed in their mahogany skiffs, and from whose oars, raised rhythmically, after having lightly cleft the water with a harmonious splash, fell—a shower of small drops sparkling as diamonds.

One day they were recognised. A sailing boat came down, tacking about rapidly. The wind made its flag crack, and the swelling sail prevented the occupants from seeing the canoe. It hugged the

bank and discovered them. A joyous cry arose—

"O Jean! . . . This is a lucky encounter! Stop! Albertine. . . . Let us bear up."

The sail fell, and the boat, manœuvred with dexterity, instead of veering about, drew up with docility alongside the canoe of the lovers.

"Oh! *mes amis*, how delighted I am to see you!" exclaimed Gamard rising. "What! You are here! And without telling anyone! And I who pass at every instant, how is it that I have not seen you before! . . ."

Albertine, charming in her boating costume of blue surah, heartily welcomed Lise. It was like a corner of the stage met with by the actresses in the holidays.

"And Michalon, who was only speaking to me of you yesterday, *mon cher* Jean! He said to me, 'What has become of him? Where has he hidden himself? He does not even write to me.' *Ah ça, mes enfants*, you will come for a sail with us? The weather is beautiful, the wind is good. . . . Her head is towards La Pecq! We will dine together. I have a band of *lascars* waiting for me in a little *cabaret*, where one can drink *Pomard* number one. We will have a *fête*, I tell you so! I will take you in *La Niniche!*"

Jean excused himself *comme un diable* from accepting Gamard's invitation, but he could not refuse to go for a sail in his boat. They towed the canoe to the opposite bank, and *La Niniche*, spreading her white wing, carried them off, lighter and more swift than a *tourterelle*.

This little incident brought about an abrupt change in the life of Lise and Jean. Their idyl was cut short. Paris, evoked by Gamard, again caught them in its whirl. They desired to know all that was passing, and the want of newspapers became felt. Every day Jean sent Francis to the railway station to buy *Le Figaro*. He awaited it impatiently, and read it hastily. Lise surprised herself by casting a glance over the *Coulisses des Théâtres*, whilst he examined the quotation of the Bourse. These two lovers, living within four leagues of the Champs-Élysées, in a charming exile, were again seized by the movement of Paris life, which was the very element of their existence, lending ear to the rumours which reached them from the great town; echoes of society, of the arts, of politics, of finance, and of the theatre. Jean was at first alarmed. He asked himself, "Do we love each other less?" But he felt his heart always filled with tenderness, and he said laughingly to Lise—

"We are decidedly not made for solitude. We are *Boulevardiers*, both of us, and I believe that we should never love each other more than in Paris. Can you imagine us shut up in a village of Brittany for six months? We should end by hating each other!"

Lise was silent, thinking that in Brittany, there was no Bourse, and she dreaded seeing Jean return to that great tumultuous building, where people conducted themselves like madmen.

She observed him with uneasiness, finding him changed in the last few days. He had become agitated and nervous. He often remained silent, his eyes fixed on vacancy, following a haunting idea. She went to him, then, passed her arm round his neck, and kissed him on her favourite spot, behind his ear. He smiled, moving his head as if to shake off the thoughts which beset him, and again occupied himself entirely with Lise.

She was certain that he thought of Paris, and that, since the first month which he had spent shut up at *Le Cœur Percé*, he had had the nostalgia of the Boulevard. She feared that he would grow weary of her, and resolved to offer him that distraction which he did not perhaps like to ask for himself. At first he received her proposal with surprise. How

could she think of it? No, he did not wish to go, he had nothing to do in Paris. To please him, she was compelled to beg him to make this effort. She required many things that he could be so kind as to bring back for her. Then, he made up his mind and, the following day, he started.

Towards six o'clock she went to meet him on the road, and saw him alight from the tramway with Michalon. The giant had attached himself to Jean, and would not let him return alone. Lise welcomed him with perfect courtesy. She knew that he was devoted to de Brives. And they dined very merrily, with the beautiful panorama spread out before their eyes. They made Michalon, who was in ecstasies, visit the house and garden.

"How comfortable you are here!" cried he. "I am no longer surprised that this fellow should have remained five weeks without letting us hear of him. He was in Paradise!"

The evening was delicious. Lise exerted herself to please Michalon, and the good fellow succumbed to her charm. He envied Jean for being loved by that adorable girl. He suffered himself to be established at the piano, and, for an hour, he played Chopin, whom he interpreted wonderfully, to them. This colossus had an exquisite talent, and with his

enormous hands, strong enough to slaughter an ox, he scarcely touched the keys, obtaining tones of an extreme delicacy. Through the open windows, the light rhythm of waltzes was poured out into the night, in harmonious bursts, and on the road below, pedestrians had stopped to listen.

Suddenly Michalon attacked *La Marche Funèbre*, with its mournful prelude, followed by the seraphic Andante which resembles the flight of a soul to heaven. Lise was impressed by the grand beauty of that composition. She begged Michalon to play it again. She would never be tired of hearing it. She drew near the piano and, in her pure voice began to sing the air. But, conquered by emotion, she melted into tears, as if, from that sublime plaint, a baneful omen was foreshadowed.

Jean hastened to her. But, ashamed of her transient weakness, she was already laughing. Michalon, to make a diversion, dashed into a waltz, and Lise and Jean danced like two wild creatures. They promised all three of them to repeat that *fête*.

Jean, regenerated, recovered his gaiety. Lise saw him go regularly to Paris ; she did not interrogate him on his return, although she was convinced that he had again thrown himself into the current of financial enterprises. He did not, as formerly, explain

to her his transactions. He felt that she had no confidence. Yet, once, he said to her in conversation—

"I saw Nuño to-day. . . . The affair is marching!"

It made her quite sad. She had gloomy presentiments. Alone, she passed her days in reading and in studying. The time to her glided away rapidly. When out of sight of Jean, she began to think of her mother. She regularly had news of her. But she reproached herself for having forsaken her for more than a month. She promised herself to make up for this neglect by her kindness and tenderness when she returned. La Barre also pre-occupied her. She wished to know what had become of him. She asked Jean's permission to invite him to pass a day with them. But here she met with unexpected resistance. Jean seemed full of care. And, as she pressed him to explain himself, not divining the motives for his opposition, he decided to broach the question of cancelling her engagement.

"I have no wish," said he, "to keep La Barre from you. He is a good fellow, who has been excellent on several occasions, although I suspect him of being very much in love with your small self."

"They all are," said Lise, merrily.

"But he has, in my eyes," pursued Jean, "one

immense fault; it is that of being the representative of this theatre which alarms me, and from which I dream of tearing you. So long as you are on the stage there will be no security for you, nor tranquillity for me."

He spoke warmly, and with emotion. She was amazed. She had not expected such a request. But if, according to his desire, she abandoned her profession, what could she do?

"Nothing," said he.

Lise knit her brows. She folded her arms over her bosom, which rose and fell hurriedly, and, regarding Jean with firmness—

"And how, then, should I live? On the money that you would give me? Are you really thinking of what you propose to me? I supply, by my work, my mother's wants and my own. And you invite me to remain idle, and to allow you to maintain me? I am an actress, and you would make of me a prostitute. You hope that I shall degrade myself to such a degree, and that I shall put an end to the ambition of my life to be your mistress? But even if I did not love my art, and did not expect from it, in the future, the brilliant results that it promises me, I should refuse that which you ask, if only from pride! I have not remained virtuous, it is true, and

I have given myself to you. But, between the weakness of my heart and the degradation which you counsel, there is the entire breadth of a stream filled with mud. And into that I will not set my feet! It is sweet to me to love you, but on this condition, that my love shall be disinterested. As to you, you already love me less, be sure of it, for you no longer respect me!"

Jean, restored to himself by that violent tirade, caught Lise in his arms, and implored her to pardon him. He was at once disquieted and jealous. He desired only to withdraw her from the Théâtre-Moderne. It was on that stage there were dangers for her: Clémence and Nuño, without counting the others. He recurred to the pistol shot, which had almost cost Lise her sight. But she, prompt to defend Clémence, declared that he must not attach more importance to that accident than it really deserved. It was a chance, and, in the street, one might any day receive a stack of chimneys upon one's head. It was at the Théâtre-Moderne that she had made her first appearance, and it was there that her success had begun: she must stay there. If she left it, where should she go?

"Why, to the Gymnase, or to the Vaudeville," answered Jean.

No matter upon what stage, finally, thought he, provided that hatred is not lying in ambush at each corner of the wings.

Then Lise, growing animated, began to speak of her hopes, of the beautiful *rôles* that she would create during the winter, and of the success that she relied upon obtaining. Was it at the moment when La Barre's play was put up for rehearsal, that she should leave the theatre? And, started in full flight in the heaven of her dreams, she had a glimpse of the house overflowing with people, sparkling with lights, burning with emotion, she heard the sound of applause. It was she whom they were cheering, and La Barre triumphant, in one single evening, broke through every obstacle, shattered all resistance, and established himself as a master in the conquered theatre.

Jean understood that he would not obtain the sacrifice which he demanded. He had found Lise, gentle, kind, complying, on every occasion, except this time. He was obliged to confess that, between her career and her love, she would not hesitate. He persisted no more, and wrote to La Barre.

The following Sunday, the latter arrived at the same hour as Michalon, and, with bitterness, Jean saw the delight of Lise. She took possession of Claude, and was never weary of questioning him.

She was eager to know his plans, she wished to hear about his works. And he, smiling, happy to see her again, lent himself to her caprice. He had begun a grand comedy on the manners and customs of the present time, very dramatic, and very sensational, that he thought of offering to the Comédie-Française, if *Les Viveurs* succeeded. And Lise said to him with melancholy—

"That piece will not be for me. You are already faithless. . . ."

"You will, perhaps, be at the Française before myself," answered La Barre, lowering his beautiful pensive head. "But, if we should meet there, we will do grand things together!"

"Eh! Do you hear him?" exclaimed Michalon, looking at them severely.

They all began to laugh. But Lise ever returned to that absorbing question of the theatre, and Claude, fully as enthusiastic as herself, was drawn on to speak with fiery eloquence. Giving the rein to his imagination, he sketched some plots of pieces, he improvised scenes, outlining the characters, with a *piquant* word, with a characteristic touch, inexhaustible, luminous, dazzling as a *feu d'artifice*. And the two men gazed at him with interest, captivated by that nervous impetuosity, carried on by

that overflowing ardour, saying to themselves—"It is impossible that this fellow will not become some one."

Lise desired that La Barre should read to her *Les Viveurs*. And, after having been entreated a little for form's sake, he consented. He was not sorry, in the depth of his heart, to essay his piece upon a small audience, before reading it to the *artistes*.

The re-opening of the theatres was drawing near. Yet fifteen days, and he would be struggling with difficulties. He could not think of it without an inward shudder. His heart contracted, and he had tinglings at the ends of his fingers. Michalon said—

"That, *mon cher*, is *le trac!* The first time that one goes out in a duel, one feels that uneasiness. And then, one becomes callous! Ask Jean!"

The following day, Claude arrived with a bulky roll of paper under his arm, and before dinner, in the salon, at a table laden with a glass of water, to make the illusion complete, he commenced his play. From the first scenes, he took possession of his hearers by the remarkable manner in which he read. They were all three, Jean, Michalon, and Lise, palpitating and fascinated. And, stimulated by the effect which he

was producing, redoubling his efforts, for three hours Claude held them under the spell.

Lise had gone to lean her elbows on the table. Her teeth clenched, her breathing short, she followed the action of the plot, as if she had been on the stage. She saw, living, moving, loving, suffering, exclaiming, sobbing, all these personages, created by the imagination of the author. And she vibrated with them in all their joys, and in all their griefs.

When La Barre, having launched the last word of the *dénouement*, stopped, and feverishly cast upon his auditors an impatient glance, he saw them silent, motionless, as if dazed. He had ended, and they still listened. Lise first returned to herself, and, springing on the neck of the author, she embraced him with enthusiasm. And, as quite delighted, he asked if it was good.

"Why, it is better than good! It is admirable! Ah! *mon ami*, what success we shall have! For you will give me the *rôle* of the young girl, will you not? Besides there is only myself who can play her! And as I shall say in the third act—'Are you, indeed, proud of having forced me to confess that I love you?'"

Crimson with emotion, she seized the manuscript and began to act the scene with a charm, a tender-

ness which wrought tears to the eyes of all. Michalon, much affected, had taken a brass paper knife that was upon the table, and, without being aware of it, he was, with his powerful hands, on the way to make it into a cork-screw. He could only repeat—

"*Sapristi!* It is awfully good!"

"And at what a pace it goes!" resumed Lise. "How rapid! O Jean, what an effect I shall make, you will see!"

And she bounded with joy, anticipating a marvellous creation destined to place her above par.

During the rest of the week, she had nothing but *Les Viveurs* in her head. She had retained in her memory whole passages from the play, and she declaimed them, acting the part of the lover and that of the *jeune première* alternately, then changing her voice to personate the comic actor. La Barre had, in her mind, become singularly great. She divined in him, with a very correct instinct, one of the future masters of the stage. She said to Jean—

"Do you see, among great authors, there are some of two kinds. Those who, whilst writing, hear their characters speak, and who put thus into their mouths, the right word for each situation. They are admirably endowed, and obtain much success. But, above those, there are the authors who hear and who

see. All the movements appear to them plainly as the plot unrolls itself. They know beforehand that this person will be in such a place when pronouncing such a sentence, and that this one will advance in such an attitude while uttering such a word. They come with a play of which the *mise en scène* is all prepared. Those are the masters. They have the second sight of genius. Well! La Barre, I am sure of it, hears and sees! In a few years, he will be at a height which will astonish many people."

The last days which they passed at the *Cœur Percé* gave back to them the sweet transports of their arrival. On thinking that they must soon part, they clung to the fleeting hours. By mutual consent they made a truce with their dreams of ambition. They thought of nothing but their love. And they appreciated the solidity of the bonds which united them.

September had come, and a few russet tints appeared in the foliage of the woods. The chestnut trees lost their leaves, and the mornings were more fresh. In the silence of the fields despoiled of their crops, Lise and Jean were walking, and a vague melancholy clouded their hearts. It seemed to the lovers that this beautiful summer, which had yielded

them so many charming days, would never return for them. They clasped each other tenderly, like two timid children who see a storm loom on the horizon.

The last week slipped away like a moment. The journals reached them, now filled with enticing details given by the reporters upon the approaching dramatic season. The programme of the Théâtre-Moderne had been issued, with powerful announcements, in which they recognised the expert hand of Rombaud. Before returning to Paris, Lise must go to Evreux to seek her mother. The two lovers paid a last visit to the woods which had seen them pass through their gloomy alleys entwined in each other's arms, to the fields where they had made long dreamy pauses, to the river which had softly borne them, when they abandoned themselves to it, letting their hands droop in its icy current.

They went over the house, the little tower, the garden. They made the miniature cascade play, as if for a supreme *fête*. And, with deep grief, one morning they saw the landau ordered from Paris draw up at the iron gate. They took each other's hand, went upon the terrace, and leaned their elbows, as on the evening of their arrival, upon the balustrade opposite that beautiful landscape which had so much captivated them. They gazed

at each other. Their eyes were full of tears. They smiled, without the power of uttering a word, and slowly they walked towards the entrance gate. The bell that they rang in opening it found an echo in their hearts. They looked back a last time, and, as if speaking to a living being, they said to that beloved house, "Adieu!" The carriage started, and, at the turning of the road, all disappeared.

## CHAPTER III.

IN the green room of the artistes at the Théâtre-Moderne, the *élite* of the company had assembled. The notice received the preceding day, which called them together, bore this inscription from the hand of Roberval: "Reading of the new piece, one o'clock, for a quarter past." The prudence of the stage-manager, who had not given the title of the work, was quite useless. All the journals had in the last eight days, announced the re-opening of the theatre with the one hundred and fifth performance of *La Duchesse*, and the impending reading of *Les Viveurs*, a drama in five acts by M. Claude La Barre.

An imaginary cast of the play followed, and a bitter-sweet paragraph upon the author, whose disaster at Cluny they recalled to memory, a presage, joyfully accepted by his kind fellow-authors, of a

fresh failure. The reporter ended by a sentence, devoted to the generous spirit of "the young and intelligent manager who so freely opened the doors of the Théâtre-Moderne to new authors," between the lines of which it was easy to read that the writer had in his table-drawer some *grosse machine*, destined in his mind to uphold the fortune of Rombaud.

They still awaited a few tardy arrivals. Clémence had just entered, fresh as a rose, grown stouter, her eye bright, her step *pimpante* and light. She had nothing but smiles and gracious words. She threw herself into the arms of Fanny Mangin, who had arrived from Dieppe, and complained of having a frightful *migraine*, and, very amiable, she complimented Madame Bréval on the success of the *tour* she had made in Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

The men, with a depressed air, were seated upon the sofas, listening to Pavilly, who was relating, with his satirical *verve*, the incidents of his travels along the coast of the channel, from Casino to Casino, with a trunk filled with monologues. The success that he had had, "No, *mes enfants*, it was incredible!" Especially with a short piece in verse, which Pierre Gros had dedicated to him. It was a

mere nothing, entitled *Le Mérite Agricole ;* or, *Rêves d'ambition d'un poireau,* but droll! The mad laughter had begun at Paramé, and, like a train of powder, had flashed as far as Calais. And, his nose in the air, winking his little eyes, Pavilly was opening his mouth to repeat the piece to his comrades, but Trincard, assuming a scornful manner, declared that he could not understand the rage that actors had for employing their holidays in running from town to town, like commercial travellers, and playing comedy, when it was so good to repose one's self at the sea-side, or beneath the shade of trees. He had arrived from Boulogne, where he had seen some delicious little Englishwomen, and there he had recovered from all his fatigues.

"Your fatigues? What fatigues?" said Pavilly with malice. . . . "You never play. . . . Ah! yes, pardon, you play on the Bourse! . . . You are not an actor; you are a stock-jobber. . ."

And Trincard laughed, curling his moustache with the delighted air of a man who transacts successful affairs—

"Yes, that is true, I am now very little of an actor, and I am looking forward to the end of my engagement, as a convict to the last days of his prison. . . ."

There was a movement; Lise appeared. Larsonnier, a tall fellow with a pallid face, a mouth like a circumflex accent, furnished with white teeth, as long as the keys of a piano, and who played low comedy, felt obliged to call out with emphasis—

"*Messieurs*, the Queen!"

Lise paused at the entrance of the green-room, a little confused. But Clémence with eager *empressement*, went forward, and stretching out her two hands to the young woman, she drew her towards herself. Lise, crimsoning, much affected by this welcome, did not resist, and the two rivals embraced each other cordially. The small groups had melted into one, the men had moved from the sofas, and now the conversation became general.

*La mère* Chrétien, very moved, casting a caressing glance at Cécile, who was smiling at vacancy, confided to Desmazures the hopes that she had with regard to a man of great importance, who was enamoured of her dear innocent.

"Oh! *certes*, she had waited long, before consenting to accept, for the child, the tempting offers that had been made to her from all sides, but she was well rewarded for her prudence, for she had found the *pie au nid*."

And, with the reverential manner of one who

introduces an ambassador, she was induced to name His Excellency the Prince of San-Dominguez. He had lately arrived from Peru, his country, where he possessed considerable silver mines. But Pavilly, who was listening, exclaimed in his mocking voice—

"A Peruvian prince? . . . *Allons donc!* In Peru there are no princes!"

"Monsieur Pavilly," repeated *la mère* Chrétien, "do me the honour to believe me, when I affirm that M. de San-Dominguez is a prince. . . ."

"Then he is an Inca! . . . Is he tattooed, does he clothe himself in a small coloured handkerchief, and has he parrot feathers on his head?"

But Cécile furious, interposed—

"Learn, M. Pavilly," said she, scornfully, "that Moralès is a superb dark man, who dresses better than you do, and who, instead of parrot-feathers, has beautiful diamonds!"

"He is called Moralès, he is dark, and he has diamonds!" exclaimed Pavilly. . . . "With that, what does it matter whether he is a prince? Angel of candour, your love is explained! Only, be on your guard; he is bound to have packs of cards in his pockets."

Exasperated, *la mère* Chrétien put her arms akimbo, and losing her grand manners, forgetful of

her recent and illustrious alliance, she was about to reply in the language of the *Halles*, when the door of Rombaud's cabinet opened, and the young manager, followed by La Barre and Delessard, entered the green-room.

A profound silence reigned, and all eyes were turned towards the author. He was pale, and his hands moved nervously. He cast a glance at Lise, who gave him a little friendly nod of encouragement. Rombaud went towards the ladies and graciously inquired after their health. Fanny, in a doleful tone, complained of not being able to see clearly, so much was she suffering from her head. Roberval gravely poured water into the glass, which stood upon a waiter, at the corner of the table covered by a green cloth.

La Barre, his mouth dry, his hair disordered, confused hummings in his ears, seated himself before his manuscript. Within himself he said, "On this reading depends the first impression, good or bad, of the artistes. If I interest them in my plot, to-morrow I can do with them what I will. If I find them indifferent, I shall be able to get nothing from them."

He was ignorant that a secret want of confidence would raise a wall of ice between the most brilliant

scenes of his work and his hearers. At the moment when he was preparing to attempt the utmost efforts in order to gain them to himself, they were thinking, on their side, of escaping from him, annoyed at having to listen to him, and looking upon that reading as an odious task.

"Ah! we are all present?" said Rombaud. "If Monsieur La Barre is quite ready, he can commence."

Claude opened his manuscript, and began with the enumeration of the characters, and the designation of the artistes who were to create them. He saw every head turned towards himself, and read curiosity upon their faces. Then, the distribution ended, the interest ceased. The artistes settled themselves comfortably, and Pavilly, his head resting upon the back of the sofa, even appeared disposed to sleep.

Claude, a little out of countenance, drank a mouthful of water, and bravely he began. Like a thorough-bred horse who grows warm in running, his powers and ardour were restored to him, and he felt master of himself. While reading, he darted, from time to time, a glance at his auditors, motionless and dumb. Not a sign, not a token of approbation. As a character appeared on the stage, he saw

the artiste who was to clothe it in flesh lend an attentive ear, then, the scene terminated, resume his or her gloomy attitude. Each followed his own *rôle*, but seemed perfectly indifferent to the *ensemble* of the work.

The act ended in the midst of a deep silence. Rombaud alone exclaimed gaily—

"The first!"

Then he turned to Massol, and interrogated him with a glance. The *metteur en scène* shook his head, with coldness, as if to say, "We shall know that presently," and politely let fall these words—

"Very good!"

Chilled, La Barre turned to Lise; he saw her quite calm, as if influenced by the presence of her comrades. She was no longer the same woman who, at the *Cœur Percé*, had exhibited such enthusiasm, seizing all the intentions of the author, and exclaiming with transport at every *coup de théâtre*. She rose, went to him, and in a tranquil voice—

"It is going on perfectly—the impression is good!"

Claude could not refrain from laughing. What would it have been, then, if the impression had been bad? A slight murmur of conversation arose, and, with disquietude, the author asked himself if his

hearers were not occupied in speaking ill of his work. He heard Pavilly mutter with surliness—

"The newspapers said that I was to play the Duc de la Fresnay. . . . Why has he given me Castorin? Is it that by chance they do not find me sufficiently distinguished to represent a duke?"

La Barre said to himself—

"We must not let them talk, or they will get up a cabal against me."

He took the second act, and continued, with great spirit, reading with such exquisite art that Massol could not refrain from whispering to Rombaud—

"*Sapristi*, how well he reads!"

He was the only one, doubtless, to feel that impression, for his comrades remained sombre, as if a prey to the most frightful depression. Fanny Mangin had opened her fan, and covered her eyes with it, by way of a shade, occasionally uttering grievous sighs. Even the prompter was not listening. La Barre, unnerved, saw the lips of Gaillardin move, and he divined that, careless of the play, the old maniac was repeating his eternal—"Badoureau, I will kill thee!"

The drama, however, began to unfold itself powerfully. The characters introduced, the action began,

and the second act ended with a scene very daring and original. Madame Bréval, who played the scene with Lise, condescended to give a sign of approval; but the others were as marble.

La Barre, his brain on fire, took up the third act, and, without waiting to breathe, exasperated, determined to vanquish the torpor of these *blasés*, to spur them with his inspiration, to lash them with his *verve*, he began again. His voice, sharpened by reading the first two acts as a knife that one grinds on a whetstone, rang out boldly. And, identified with his characters, throwing himself with impetuosity into the drama, almost acting it, at the same time that he spoke it, he strained his powers to a superb effort. His vast brow seemed more lofty, and his expressive mouth was curved bitterly for irony, or smiled sweetly in tenderness.

He read the love scene, and, filled with impassioned ardour, he gave the supplications of the distracted lover. It was evening, in a garden, at the hour when the stars first show themselves in the heavens, when the perfume of the plants rises into the warm air with a more penetrating fragrance. And, with poetical fervour, he described the ecstasy which, little by little, took possession of these two beings, young, beautiful, and drawn to each other by a

violent passion. His eyes sparkled, he shook his long hair, and, forgetting everything, the place in which he was, those who surrounded him, captured by his work, he read for himself, with a sublime transport.

A long murmur struck his ear. He raised his eyes, perceived all the *artistes* sitting erect in their places, impressed, conquered, subdued. He cast upon his public a penetrating glance, and, with the intoxication of triumph, he spoke the last words of the act amidst loud applause. In one moment, he was surrounded. Rombaud, radiant, sought for praises; and Massol, losing the *sang-froid* of an old actor, who had played at the Théâtre Historique the dramas of the great Dumas, exclaimed—

"Ah! *mes enfants!* There is a termination to an act, *par exemple!* If we do not make an effect with that, it is that we are only novices!"

Claude, panting like a race-horse which has just won the *Grand Prix*, remained standing, his head dazed, fatigued by his exertions, and listening to the remarks which were exchanged. He was conscious that, for him, the game was won. At last, then, he held them at his mercy those refractory ones who would not surrender. He had seized them by the throat, and now they could no more escape him.

He looked at Clémence Villa, whose discontent he dreaded. He knew what were the pretensions of the actress, he was acquainted with the influence that she possessed through the protection of Nuño. The character which he had given her was of importance, but it was a harsh and violent personage, one of those third *rôles* which had the gift of enraging her. He saw her animated and joyous, conversing with Madame Bréval and Fanny Mangin, who, crimson, excited, had forgotten her *migraine* and no longer made use of her fan to hide her beautiful eyes.

"Now, La Barre, now!" said Rombaud, patting the manuscript; "do not let us grow cold!"

And Claude, sure now of his audience, commenced again, shading his effects, pointing his sentences, and chiselling his words, flattered at each moment by the satisfied murmurs of those big children, who, having left off pouting, passed from one extreme to the other, and exaggerated their approbation. The fourth act, short, clear, impetuous, spinning along like a cannon-ball, drew cries of enthusiasm, and the fifth, which was a simple and touching conclusion, crowned the reading with a unanimous ovation.

It was five o'clock, and the day was beginning to decline. In the vast house, all the *artistes* stood

talking with excitement. Roberval took up the packet of *rôles* and called in a loud tone—

"Le Duc de la Fresnay—Desmazures. . . . Gaston Dusollier—Trincard. . . . Castorin—Pavilly. . . ."

And each taking the small manuscript book, balanced it on the palm of the hand, as if estimating the importance of the *rôle* by its weight, and, with an anxious eye, counted the number of the cues. . . . . .

"It is curious," said Mortagne, "all the parts are nearly of the same length. . . ."

"Thanks!" exclaimed Pavilly sharply; "not mine. . . . There is nothing at all of it. If it fell upon your foot, it would not crush it!" Then, in a low tone, "*Encore une panne!*"

Desmazures, a regular man of the world, had drawn on his pearl-gray gloves, and, with an impressive air, he went to compliment La Barre. . . .

"It was charming! Quite charming. . . ."

He thanked Claude for having been so good as to confide to him the *rôle* of the Duke. "*Certes*, he would make every effort to play it well. . . ."

And drawing him aside mysteriously—

"This duke, is a man still young, is he not? Do you look upon him as dark or fair?"

And as La Barre appeared much astonished at this question—

"My dear author," added he. "I ask you these details, because from to-day I shall live in my *rôle*. . . . And I must make full inquiries, so that I may create him dark or light, in mind as well as in body. . . . A dark man, do you see, does not behave in the same way as a fair man. . . . Their natures are very dissimilar. . . . Therefore, at home, I study my *rôles en perruque*, that the play of my features may be thoroughly adapted to the temperament of my character. . . ."

And Claude, very seriously, replied—

"The Duc de la Fresnay is dark, M. Desmazures, dark, growing gray at the temples. But light or dark, you will be excellent. . . ."

And, bowing to the actor, he went back to the others.

Pavilly, with a dismayed face, had approached Rombaud, and, in a piteous tone—

"Why have they given me Castorin? He is not at all my business! At first I was to have played La Fresnay. . . As to Castorin, one can cut him out; he has nothing to do with the action. . . . He is of no use! If only he were droll, but he is not. . . And he is not even loved!"

Pavilly desired to be loved. It was his mania. In all the pieces where young girls were not infatuated about him, he saw nothing to do. La Fresnay, at least, married at the end. A widow, without doubt, but, in fine, he did marry! And, resuming his lamentations, the actor, his back rounded, his face heart-broken, repeated—

"Oh, no! not Castorin!"

Rombaud, irritated, had ended by saying—

"Now, Pavilly, it is always the same tale with you! The part is excellent! And, if it were mediocre, it would be a further reason for giving it to you, as it would require a talented actor to play it!"

Then Pavilly cried, with triumphant bitterness—

"There, the secret is out! They give me all the bad *rôles*, because I save them! Oh! but I have had enough of playing the Newfoundland dog!"

La Barre was talking with Lise, and, while listening to the young woman, he was on the watch, eager to know the secret impression produced by his piece.

"It is good!" said Delessard, in a low voice, "but we must be on our guard. He is tremendously sly, that fellow, *allez!* He glides over the weak passages, and dwells upon the strong scenes. . . . He tricked us with his reading. . . . One could

see nothing but fire! . . . On the stage, the piece may not be able to hold its own. . . . We must judge it when before the footlights!"

Rombaud, released from Pavilly, had led Clémence into a corner, and there, excessively amiable, he interrogated her. Was she satisfied with her *rôle?* She saw that he had taken care of her. La Barre, by his advice, had added a scene for her. But the actress answered her manager with a face as cold as a December morning, "It was again a repulsive part; and he knew that she execrated them. . . . The longer it was, the less was she satisfied. She would have more painful and unthankful things to say."

Then Rombaud very courteously proposed to her not to play it if she was discontented. He could give the part to little Menneval, whom he had just engaged. But Clémence then declared, in a very dry tone, that she never shunned her duty. She had made no observations; it was not her custom. He had asked her opinion: she gave it. But she would play her *rôle*, none the less, and do her best, like the good *pensionnaire* that she was.

Of Lise and of her *rôle* she did not say a word. She appeared to have made a truce with her hatred.

She showed herself full of kindness to her comrade; and she even put back her hair to see if any trace of the burns remained, again expressing her regret at having hurt that "*chère mignonne.*"

"La Barre, let us go into my cabinet, will you?" said Rombaud.

And he went, making a sign to Delessard and Massol to follow him.

There, away from the eyes of his *artistes*, he yielded without reserve to his overflowing satisfaction. He complimented Claude. He foresaw a grand success. Such a play, and Lise to act in it, they would see! Then, as Delessard and Massol entered, changing his tone, he put himself into a tremendous passion. Who was the animal that had first published an antagonistic article relating to La Barre, copied with delight by all the other dramatic reporters? It was an infamous piece of treachery! They depreciated his author, they vexatiously influenced the public. He discovered in that a manœuvre of his competitors, annoyed at seeing him succeed. But he would answer it by a *coup de tam-tam.*

He gave orders to Delessard to draw up a paragraph for the journals, and, in his feverish agitation, he dictated it to him, punctuating his sentences by

heavy blows struck, with his clenched fist, upon his *bureau* :—

"This day, at the Théâtre-Moderne, the reading of *Les Viveurs* took place. The drama of M. Claude La Barre was received by the *artistes* with enthusiastic applause. An enormous success is expected."

And as La Barre, troubled by the exaggeration of the eulogy, tried to stop Rombaud, and to induce him to modify the too high-sounding terms of the article—

"Let me alone!" cried the manager; "you do not know what is necessary to stimulate the taste of the public. Capsicum, red pepper, and, at a pinch, vitriol! This will put them in a good temper! Go, Delessard, and get that copied for me by the administration. . . I wish to see that announcement to-morrow morning in all the journals."

Then, turning to La Barre, with the majestic and commanding gesture of a small Louis XIV.—

"They look it over to-morrow, and the day after they rehearse! You will come, is it not so? Let us strike the iron while it is hot!"

He descended the stairs with Claude, holding him by the arm with an air of proprietorship, and they both went to the check-taker's office. In the deserted vestibule, the *sergent de ville* was walking up and

down with a sullen air, and Madame Seigneur, in her wooden sentry-box, was vainly waiting to let her places. She made a melancholy gesture which caused Rombaud to collapse suddenly.

He approached the wicket at which the tickets are issued and heard the lamentations of his *buraliste.*

"We shall not make twelve hundred francs to-night. . . . *La Duchesse* is quite worn out. Replacing Lise Fleuron and Clémence by substitutes has done harm: it is time to renew the hand-bill."

The clever woman inquired the result of the reading; and as Rombaud again became enthusiastic, she looked at him calmly, and said—

"Pavilly has already been here to say that his *rôle* is detestable, and that the first act, the second, and the beginning of the third, are excessively wearisome!"

"Bah!" said Rombaud cheerfully. "You well know that Pavilly always complains. . . . It is ever a good augury when he falls with might and main upon a play. . . . We shall have a triumph, it is I who tell it to you!"

He rejoined La Barre beneath the peristyle, shook the hand of his author, stepped into a *fiacre* which was waiting before the theatre, and said to the driver, "Faubourg Saint-Honoré."

He was going to see Nuño. The civility that he had shown Clémence was not disinterested, and, as he had proposed to her not to play, if her *rôle* displeased her, it is certain that he had good reasons for doing so. He had, in fact, and it was his cashier who had, that same morning, given them to him. The position of the Théâtre-Moderne was not solidly established. After a year of success, they had only regained a portion of all that they had lost; but the entire capital had been employed in improvements, in alterations, and in property. A sum of three hundred thousand francs, advanced by Sélim, had been repaid: they therefore owed nothing, but they had not a *sou* in hand, and they must rub on from day to-day.

With the projects that he had in his brain, Rombaud could not resign himself to steer his bark prudently and economically. He felt that the wind was in his favour, he desired to launch forth with audacity and to set himself again afloat. Yet another lucky year, he would be the master of his affairs and would begin to gain money. Then, with five or six hundred thousand francs of profit, he could pay enormous interest to his shareholders, and his theatre would become one of those gold mines, as the Palais-Royal had been, and as the Variétés and the Vaude-

ville are, which give almost the amount of the capital in annual dividends.

It was, in fine, fortune, accompanied by all the gratifications of *amour-propre* for which Rombaud was eager. He would reign ostentatiously over the dramatic world. He would have around him the greatest writers, the most celebrated *artistes*, the most charming women, all assiduous to please him. And he would march through life as a triumpher. With his ardent imagination, he formed admirable projects. He desired to unite his name with the revival of the drama. He had already found the theatre: he would create authors. He had but to make a sign, and a whole constellation of writers would appear, radiant with genius.

And, following the line of the Boulevards in his fiacre, fallen from the height of his dream, he thought that he must first obtain from Nuño the requisite funds. He knew that Clémence, on leaving the theatre, had gone to see Sélim for an instant. From what she had said would depend in great measure the reception that the banker would give him. Clémence had considerable influence over Nuño, who, arrived at the age when men ask little more of women than to brighten the decline of their lives with a ray of youth and of beauty, always

found the actress disposed to listen to his financial dissertations, ready to relate gaily to him the scandals of the day, and resolute to shut her eyes to his last vagaries.

When Rombaud had interrogated her, Clémence appeared little satisfied with her part, but she determined to play it, and that was the essential point. With her quick intelligence, she had comprehended the great importance of the new work. She had followed act by act, the progress of the interest. She had divined the attraction that this drama would exercise over the public, in which a sketch of contemporaneous manners, drawn by a powerful and satirical mind, was skilfully blended with an excessively emotional action. The part which had been distributed to her was of great importance, she was well aware of it, and never since she had been at the theatre had they given her so beautiful a *rôle* to create.

But the satisfaction she would have experienced had been suffocated, by the ferocious envy that the unfolding of Lise's *rôle* had let loose within her. It was parallel with her own, and she had been able to measure its admirable proportions. It was the ideal *rôle* of a *jeune première*—a *rôle* caressed by an author in love with his heroine, or with the

actress who would personify her, alternately joyous, sad, and impassioned. It went straight on, and interpreted itself, so well did the dexterously-handled situations, with which it was filled, succeed each other. Played by such an actress as Lise, it was bound to produce an immense sensation, and to be the brilliant spot in the career of her who should create it.

In order to seize this *rôle*, Clémence felt prepared for anything. She had a conviction that if she played it her reputation would be made at one swoop, and that she would be able to raise her eyes as high as she pleased. Her ambition was in accord with her hatred.

She wished to be in the piece, to have the opportunity to prepare her plots, and to set her snares. She would thus become acquainted with all the incidents which might occur unexpectedly, and would seize the moment when she could turn them to account. She relinquished all violent methods. She relied a little upon Nuño, a great deal upon herself, and for the rest, she trusted to chance, which often is in concord with the ambitious. As Rombaud had divined, she went to see Sélim, before returning home. And, as the manager of the Théâtre-Moderne arrived in the Faubourg Saint-

Honoré, the *coupé* of Clémence emerged from the banker's courtyard, at the full trot of a pair of horses, taking the direction of the Avenue Hoche.

Rombaud alighted *bourgeoisement* at the gate, entered the court, and turning to the right, quickly ascended a small staircase. The greater part of the outbuildings belonging to the hôtel, formerly occupied by the Spanish Ambassador, had been converted by Sélim into *bureaux*. That sumptuous dwelling, built in the reign of Louis XV. by the Duc de Caumont-la-Tour, had been so arranged as to put up an army of servants. Forty horses could find room in the stables, and the coach-houses were capable of containing twenty carriages. The hôtel, with its elegant *perron* and iron-hand rail, occupies the farther end of the gravelled courtyard, in the centre of which a round plot of turf, encircled with flowers, gives repose to the eyes, fatigued by the white tints of the stone façade.

The *bureaux* of the house of Nuño and Grameda are as spacious as those of a Minister. It is there that the vast financial operations of the Portuguese are elaborated. On the ground floor are the receiving rooms for shares and coupons, and the bank; on the entresol, the commercial departments; expedition office for England; Spanish wine by millions

of *hectolitres*; notices of the arrival of vessels laden with ingots of silver from Bolivia, or of earth-nuts from China. On the first floor is the board-room of the Roumanian Railway Company, and the management of the steam-boat service between Marseilles and Odessa, for the transport of grain. Two hundred clerks distributed in thirty distinct sections, are preparing, elucidating, settling the colossal affairs of Nuño. He has four secretaries for his correspondence—English, German, Russian, and Spanish.

From ten till six o'clock there is in this building too small to contain that swarm of busy *employés*, a perpetual going and coming of brokers, of agents, of merchants, and tradesmen, wishing to speak with Nuño, and obtaining only, after great difficulty, the favour of being received by his managing clerks. One sees, in the ante-rooms of the banker, costumes of every country, from the grave and collected Turk with his red fez to the Chinese in a tunic of blue silk, a black *calotte*, and with long, braided hair, who carries in the European fashion, an umbrella under his arm. A carpet of linoleum is spread the whole length of the passages, and deadens the sound of footsteps. In the vestibule, on the entresol, seated at tables placed along the wall, four messengers are at the service of the public.

Rombaud was acquainted with the ways of the place, and did not stop in that room, the first circle of this financial hell. He threaded the passage to the right, pushed open three swing-doors, and reached a luxurious ante-room, lighted from above, in which a *huissier*, clad in black, wearing a silver chain about his neck, was gravely walking. Rombaud was well-known in the house, for the important functionary in the garb *à la Française*, condescended to smile, and said to the manager, with the cajoling air of a man who does not disdain to ask for free admissions—

"M. Nuño is with the Portuguese Consul. . . . It will be the affair of an instant. . . . If Monsieur will take a seat. . . ."

"Thanks, Clément," said Rombaud familiarly, and, with an irregular step, he walked up and down the ante-room. He was anxious. He who ruled as a master in his theatre, he was about to risk a humble request for money. He remembered the day when, at Bordeaux, he had presented himself at his parent's house, with arms outstretched, with eyes humid, calling him his father, and had been coldly given over to the sturdy inexorability of the man-servant who had shoved him down stairs. He who so cruelly made others wait, had himself now the

anguish of waiting. At last a bell rang, a door opened, and Rombaud entered.

In his cabinet, a lofty and spacious room, hung with old Spanish leather stamped and gilded, furnished in carved pear-tree, Sélim was alone. Never was a visitor liable to find himself face to face with the one who followed him. A private outlet brought him to the courtyard. This precaution betrayed many mysteries: clandestine disclosures, hidden perfidies, whose authors sought the obscurity and silence of secret doors. The banker did not rise. He addressed to Rombaud a friendly wave of the hand. The manager bowed, with the smile of a courtier, and going towards Nuño—

"How are you," said he, "*mon cher patron?*"

He drew a chair near the writing-table and seated himself. The Portuguese did not reply. He gazed earnestly at Rombaud, like a cat which holds a mouse in its power. He leaned back consequentially in his cushioned arm-chair, and his bushy eyebrows almost entirely concealed his eyes.

"You did not meet de Brives in coming?" said he at length, in his guttural voice.

"No," answered Rombaud. "You are still transacting business with him?"

"I have done so," said Nuño. "He interests

me, that fellow. I have given him hints. . . . But he is like all young men: he cannot endure to be guided, he will not accept tutelage. . . He professes to follow his own inspirations. . . . Desvignes, the stockbroker, who executes his commissions, did not wish to get involved for him beyond a certain figure. . . *Ils ont été rincés dans le Krach*, the brokers; they are suspicious now! . . . And de Brives came to ask me to become responsible. . . ."

"Did you consent to it?" asked Rombaud, curiously, for he knew that Nuño never did anything without a motive.

"Yes," said the Portuguese, whose voice sounded like a steel spring, "as far as a certain sum. . . If he carries out my directions, he will succeed. . . If not . . no!"

"But, then, you risk losing?"

"One always risks losing," said Sélim, coldly. "But I have a guarantee."

The two men looked at each other. Rombaud shuddered. He said to himself—

"The old villain wishes to have Jean in his power, and the guarantee of which he speaks is Lise!"

Nuño cast a piercing glance at Rombaud, and

saw him thoughtful. He desired to divert the current of his ideas.

"I have just made an acquisition," said he. "The Comte de Bérange is in difficulties; he wished to get rid of his racing stable; I have bought it of him as it stands. . ."

"You are going to run horses?"

"Why not, since I can no longer run myself?" said Sélim, laughing. "In the Oise I have the estate of Villepreneuse, where it will be easy to set up a racing stud. I shall turn my attention to training; it will be an amusement. . ."

"Have you spoken of it to Clémence?"

"Yes. She was delighted. For a long time Fanny Mangin has teased her with the stable of the little Marquis Bévignano. . . . That dear girl will herself choose my colours. . . ."

Rombaud was silent. He was preparing his opening sentence, and regarding Sélim with disquietude. He found him very loquacious, and said to himself, "He wishes to turn me from my purpose. Attention!"

He summoned all his courage and began to explain the situation of the Théâtre-Moderne. In truth, Nuño could not question the future prosperity of the house. The three hundred thousand francs

that he had advanced, over and above his sleeping-partnership, had been refunded to him, and he knew all the hopes that might be founded on the new play. It became the duty of his excellent patron, of his dear protector, to lend his support yet once more, to the valiant *troupe* of which Clémence was a star.

And, giving way to his southern fervour, he compared Sélim to the patrons of the great painters, those illustrious Italian princes who had caused a whole harvest of master-pieces to spring up from the blessed soil of the land of the arts.

He paused. Nuño, so cheerful before, was now taciturn. With chin in hand, he examined Rombaud, and his swarthy face was immobile as bronze. The manager then affected to be quite at ease: he applied first to Nuño, so that the affair should not be known out of the family. But he had under his hand lenders quite ready to come to terms. . . .

"So much the better," said Sélim in his rough voice, "for, if I determined to oblige you, I should have disagreeable scenes. . . . Clémence is not contented! . . . "

"Not contented!" cried Rombaud.

And, no longer restraining himself, on seeing his request refused, he allowed the flood of his anger to burst forth.

Clémence was at the same time stupid and ungrateful. What! He who had given the actress her position, he was exposed to her spiteful and ill-natured behaviour! . . . What would she be without him? A *belle fille*, and that was all!

Nuño smiled. He had this rejoinder upon his lips—

"What would you be without her? A bad provincial actor, a petty stock-jobber!"

He did not give himself the easy pleasure of crushing Rombaud. And the latter, recovering his meekness, became very humble, very caressing. He tried to persuade Sélim. But he could more readily have broken through a rock with his finger-nails. Then, regaining his pride, he professed great security of mind and went out disguising his trouble beneath a smile. On the small staircase, he yielded to the rude anger of a peasant, which relieved him. He cursed, threatened, and devoted to every fatality, that old scoundrel, who had just purchased a racing stable, and who denied him the money he required for his theatre.

He crossed the courtyard with the stately step of a man who renders services and who does not accept them. It was not for nothing that he had played comedy under the name of Francisque. And,

moreover, he was a Gascon. While walking, he said to himself—

"What shall I do? If I apply to de Brives? No! He is himself guaranteed by Nuño. That infernal Portuguese, who certainly deserves the *bagne*, has his hand in every pocket!"

He began to laugh; he had just thought of the leader of his *claque*. He said almost aloud—

"What a fool I am! There is Bernard."

He again stepped into his carriage, and called to the driver—

"Rue Saint-Marc, number twenty-eight."

*Henri Bernard, from twelve to six o'clock*, such is the inscription, on the card of the leader of the *claque* at the Théâtre-Moderne and at five other large theatres in Paris. On the third floor, overlooking the court, below the office for dramatic copies, flourishes the agency of *Veuve Gautier et Fils*, that cultivator of success, who is, at the same time, the purchaser of the authors' tickets at each of his theatres. Independently of the rights that he claims over the gross receipts, the author of a play receives from the administration tickets for a certain sum discussed and fixed in advance and secured by contract. These tickets, which he would not know how to turn to account, Bernard takes

from him at half-price, and has them sold at the door of the theatre, by men of his own, tattered rascals, with croaking voices, who conduct their customer to the liqueur-dealer's at the corner.

Bernard, who has dealings of importance with most of the great authors, employs four clerks, shut up in a small room, furnished in old mahogany covered with horse-hair, and along the walls of which are ranged immense boxes containing copies of plays. When a man of talent is in difficulties, Bernard does not hesitate to lend him twenty or thirty thousand francs. He has at his house, piteous letters signed with some of the greatest names in contemporary literature.

It was *le père* Bernard who commenced the fortune of the agency by competing with the *Maison Porcher*. The old *claqueur*, cunning as a lawyer in the provinces, invested his savings in a theatrical enterprise, taking a mortgage on the stock. The management became bankrupt, but Bernard remained in possession of the scenery and of the costumes. He let them to five or six companies who succeeded each other in the space of three years, every evening claiming the sum agreed upon from the receipts. In this way he doubled his capital, and joined the association of the *Société*

*Nantaise.* He naturally appropriated to himself the *claque* at all the theatres of the society, and began to sell tickets.

He was a little old man, lean and dry, wearing a wig, which seemed to be carved in rosewood, and always having cotton-wool in his ears. He neglected no profit, and knew how to ask authors if they "*faisaient l'abandon.*" This was a small previous deduction of six francs an evening from the price that he had to pay for the tickets, and would be destined to stimulate the zeal of the *claqueurs.* To him also is due the glory of having replaced, in successful pieces, his *claqueurs*, whom he would have been obliged to pay, by amateurs, desirous of seeing the play gratis. The bargain was concluded at the wine shop, that *salon* of the people, and the seats in the fourth gallery, that the administration placed at the disposal of the *Romains*, were occupied by spectators who, at a signal given by the old Bernard, applauded with hand and with voice.

Thanks to his ingenuity, the leader of the *claque* left to his son, in addition to his connexion, three hundred thousand francs of net money. Henri, well launched in the current of fashionable life, but as clever a man of business as his father, gave up shabby artifices, and vulgar and petty profits. He

went to work on a large scale, and as a man of the world.

He is a charming and amiable fellow, living in good style, occupying upon the same floor as his agency, a pretty set of four rooms, and having for his mistress, Jeanne Letourneur, a handsome and witty girl, who sings pleasingly in operetta. *Le père* Bernard had the crafty and pitiful manner of a bailiff's follower: his son the seductive and joyous appearance of a *viveur*. Nevertheless, each was as shrewd and as honest as the other, for it is only justice to say that, the word of *Bernard Père et Fils* has always been as good as their signature.

The only difficulties that they have ever encountered have been caused by the purchase from young authors, on the managers' account, of certain *scènes de genre*, opening pieces in one act, which are played every evening, taking from the author of the grand play which draws the public three per cent. on the gross receipts. Bernard collects from the *Société des Auteurs* the payment for these *leviers de rideau*, and loyally places the money in the hands of the managers, who receive, in that way, three or four thousand francs a month, for a little piece which has generally cost them five hundred francs when first put on the stage. The Bernards have always main-

tained that they had a right to effect this kind of transaction. Besides, they have never drawn any profit from it. They were purely and simply the *hommes de paille* of the managers.

Rombaud did not turn the handle of the door, above which is fixed a brass plate engraved with these words, *Agence Bernard.* He rang the bell at the door of the apartments, and at the end of a few moments a *bonne* opened it.

"Is Monsieur Bernard at home?" asked the manager, entering an ante-room elegantly furnished.

A *portière* was raised, and Bernard appeared, hat in hand.

"What! is it you, Monsieur Rombaud?" said he. . . "A minute more and you would not have found me; I was going out!"

He showed the manager into his *salon*, and, offering him a chair—

"What has given me the pleasure of your visit?"

Rombaud knew his man; he went straight to the point—

"Bernard, I want money. And, as I do not wish the world to know that I am embarrassed, I apply to you."

Bernard did not move a muscle; he only said—

"*Eh bien!* And Nuño?"

"That idiot of a Clémence is trying to embroil me with him," replied Rombaud frankly. "I have nothing to hide from you; you have interests in the theatre, and you are as desirous as myself to see it prosper. . . . Yes, *mon cher*, Clémence is dissatisfied with the *rôle* that she has in the new play. . . . A magnificent *rôle!* And she has been complaining to Sélim. . . . I found the Portuguese obdurate! Now, you know what my position is. I am on the eve of being at par. . . . La Barre's drama is an assured success. . . . Lise will be adorable. I shall surround her with Pavilly, Mortagne, Desmazures, and Trincard. . . . With Madame Bréval, with Fanny, with Cécile, with all the little women in *toilettes à tout casser*. . . . If, with that, we do not make money, I understand nothing about it!"

"How much do you want?"

"A hundred thousand francs. I have to pay my people, and I no longer make a *sou* with *La Duchesse*."

"I know that well! For how long a time do you want the money?"

"For six months."

"The affair can be arranged. Where do you dine?"

"With you, if you will."

"I was about to propose it. Let us go out: it is too warm here," said the tall fellow; "we will talk on the way. . . . Ah! Clémence tells tales! Well! but to pacify her, we can, at the first opportunity, leave her to play in the cold, *et lui faire piquer une tête!*"

They followed the Rue de Richelieu, filled with busy wayfarers, obstructed by carriages and omnibuses. It was the hour when everyone is going home to dine. In the streets situated near the Boulevards the circulation is most active. The *cafés* overflow with consumers, and the odour of absinthe stirred, of beer spilt over the marble tops of the tables, mingled with the acrid scent of cigar smoke, reached them as they walked. Rombaud spoke with animation, explaining his projects, sure of the future, and joyful at having found, apart from Nuño, the support of which he was in need. They crossed de Brives in a carriage, who saluted them with his hand.

"He is always with Lise?" asked Bernard.

"Yes," replied Rombaud, suddenly thoughtful.

"He is a daring fellow," resumed Bernard. . . "He is in Bénagoas up to the neck. . ."

"Is it safe?" asked Rombaud, to whom the obscure and menacing words of Sélim recurred.

"They think so. But of what can one be sure in financial matters at the present time? The *Union* also, was said to be safe. And you know what has happened there."

In an instant, before Rombaud's eyes the impassioned faces of Jean and Lise passed, led to their ruin by the terrible Sélim. He had a presentiment of a frightful intrigue plotted in the shadow. The voice of Bernard tore him from his pre-occupation. They were before the *Café Riche*. He shook his head, and replying to himself, he said—

"What can I do in it?"

"Nothing at all," said Bernard, gazing curiously at Rombaud, as if he had read his thought. "Meanwhile, let us go and dine."

## CHAPTER IV.

THE rehearsals of *Les Viveurs* went on at a great rate. It was known in the theatre that the receipts of the play in course of representation were insufficient, and they were hastening to mount the new drama. La Barre, sitting in front of the stage lighted by a *servante*—a tall gas lamp branching from the footlights—before the stand of the leader of the orchestra, directed the work with a sureness of sight, and a command of dramatic resources which at once revealed him as a scenic manager of the first class. On his left he had Massol, on his right the prompter, furnished with the manuscript. And upon the dimly-lighted stage, between three pieces of old scenery, with straw-bottomed chairs to represent a suite of furniture,

he looked at and listened to the actors, who, in walking costume, with hat on head, with hands in pockets, stammered through their *rôles* in a low voice, that they might not fatigue themselves.

From time to time Massol rose, and, taking the place of the actor who was rehearsing, he said—

"No, *mon petit*, I should not interpret the action like that. . . I should let myself sink into the arm-chair, and, with arms drooping, head shaking, I should await the cue. . . You, Desmazures, you must pass while repeating your sentence. . . Then Mortagne rises and walks quickly towards you. . . Is it not so, Monsieur La Barre? Now, let us try that as I have just shown it. . . . Let us begin again. . . ."

He went back to his chair. Mortagne and Desmazures again commenced the scene, and followed his directions, but the effect was not yet satisfactory. Then Claude sprang up and, throwing off his overcoat, to be more at liberty in his movements, began to act. He did not confine himself to explaining that which he desired—he executed it, and with rare perfection. Without having studied it, he had that peculiar gift of imitating voices. When he took Desmazures' place, in order to play the scene with Mortagne,

he spoke like the actor; and the *artistes*, who were in the *coulisses*, did not know whether it was their comrade or the author who filled the *rôle*.

Rombaud went to his cabinet before the opening scene, having confidence in La Barre since he had seen him at work, stopping sometimes at the other side of the stage to converse with Lise or with Madame Bréval. After the trick that she had played him, he treated Clémence with severity. He discarded her from his familiar intimacy. He no longer said "thou" to her, and, when obliged to speak, he ceremoniously called her Mademoiselle Villa.

The day after the visit fruitlessly paid to Nuño, they had an explanation. The manager, during the collation of the *rôles*, had led Clémence to his cabinet, and there he upbraided her bitterly. He found her impassible. To all his recriminations she had opposed a frozen silence. Yet, as he returned for the tenth time to Nuño's unheard-of refusal, which had forced him to seek elsewhere the hundred thousand francs that he required, overwhelming Clémence with reproaches and saying to her, "How could I do more for you than I have done? What is it that you want?" lightning

flashed from the eyes of the actress, and, in a peremptory voice, she replied—

"What do I want? The *rôle* of Lise!"

Then Rombaud, shrugging his shoulders, and gazing at Clémence with offensive pity—

"To give you the *rôle* of Lise, for a hundred thousand francs? Not enough money, *ma fille*, you know! The hundred thousand francs would not pay the discrepancy in the receipts!"

The actress rushed out of the cabinet without saying a word, but casting at Rombaud a deadly glance. And they had not spoken since, except of her duties.

At the end of fifteen days of rehearsal, Lise already acted with an adorable charm. She had fallen in love with her character, and she, the model *pensionnaire*, had never before worked with so much ardour. She no longer sought the exquisite correctness, the penetrating emotion, which had made her triumph in her last *rôles*. She desired to go beyond and to develop an original creation. Confident now, in her powers, she no longer feared to yield to her inspiration. And, guided by a marvellous instinct, aided by an admirable nature, she had godsends of genius which promised to give a remarkable personality to her acting.

La Barre, all nerves with the other interpreters, exciting himself, lavishing his efforts, bounding on the stage, and intervening in the dialogue, was with her, silent, thoughtful, seeming in a trance. He listened to her words, he watched her movements. Then, disquieted at seeing him motionless and as if petrified, Lise paused and turning towards him—

"Monsieur La Barre," said she, "is it thus that you would have it? Have I quite understood your intention? Tell me, if you are not satisfied!"

He appeared to awake from a dream and answered—

"It is perfectly right, Mademoiselle. . . . I could not wish it to be better. . . . Continue, I beseech you. . . ."

"Now, *mes enfants, enchaînons*," said Massol in the monotonous voice of a man who, for thirty years, has repeated the same thing. And the play proceeded.

When Lise was on the stage, they saw at the corner of a pillar supporting the scenery, or in a half-open door, Clémence regularly appear. She followed the work of Lise with keen interest. And when dissatisfied, desirous of doing better, the actress corrected a movement, or changed an intonation, she approved it with her head, encouraged her with a

look, and seemed to attach as much importance to the perfection of the acting as Lise herself. The latter, touched by what she called the *bonne camaraderie* of Clémence, consulted her, and often followed her advice.

All trace of animosity had disappeared from the bearing of the Italian. And, if Rombaud had not been so exactly informed with regard to the true sentiments of his *pensionnaire*, he would have been deceived by her feigned gentleness. Without wishing to open Lise's eyes, he tried to put her on her guard against the hypocritical kindness of Clémence. But he caused great surprise to the young woman, and did not succeed in convincing her. Seeing Lise discontented, and already prepared to accuse him of spitefulness, he did not persist, but promised himself to watch over her. He inspected the trap-doors with extreme care, believing Clémence perfectly capable of paying some one to let her rival fall down below as into an *oubliette*. He occupied himself with material dangers, he thought of protecting the body of Lise; and it was mentally that Clémence threatened her, it was in the heart that she dreamed of striking.

Every day, at five o'clock, Jean went to await Lise at the termination of the rehearsal. He re-

mained in the carriage which had brought him from the club, and the young woman arrived, *pimpante*, animated, at the thought of again seeing him whom she loved. She stepped in, and, closely clasped to each other, they went for a drive in the Bois. They often met Clémence at the turning of an alley, in her victoria, drawn by a pair of handsome horses. The two women exchanged gracious smiles. Jean affected not to see Clémence, and, when he could not dispense with bowing to her, he raised his hat with frigid politeness. Lise then laughed at him about his long rancour. And he gravely answered—

"It is true: I cannot pardon her the harm that she has done you."

Near the training-place of the *Cercle des Patineurs*, they found Michalon mounted on a black horse as large as an elephant. And the giant then escorted them, chatting gaily through the carriage window. At a quarter to seven, Jean deposited Lise at the corner of the Rue de Lancry. The young woman never failed to return to dine with her mother, notwithstanding the violent scenes made by the blind woman, exasperated at what she called the "scandalous conduct" of her daughter. These meals were a torment that Lise underwent with humble resignation. She saw in it the just punishment for her fault. She accused her-

self at those times of loving too much, but she was powerless to resist an allurement which was her delight. She had also Jean's reproaches to bear, who complained that she sacrificed him too completely. To him she replied with mildness—

"She is my mother, *mon ami*, and she is very old! Whatever she may do, and whatever she may say, I must not forget the troubles that she had when I was little. A mother is sacred; one ought to place her above everything! I understand that you can complain. . . . I, on my side, I have not every day a quiet and happy life. . . . But she is my mother. . . . And, do you see, we never have but one!"

As often as she could, when the blind woman was in her chamber, when she had seen her in bed, carefully tucked in, sleeping, she stole out and went to find Jean in the Rue Taitbout. She stayed with him till midnight, never later, then inexorably returned home.

She made him explain minutely the mechanism of operations on the Bourse. She had difficulty in comprehending that the mere advantage of having foreseen a rise or a fall could make considerable sums pass from the pocket of one into the pocket of another. She found these transactions profoundly

immoral. And all the artifices employed to guide the fluctuation of stocks, paragraphs in journals enthusiastic or the reverse, false intelligence skilfully spread, alarming reports clandestinely propagated, appeared to her highly criminal. That which scandalised her, was the speculating on stocks that one did not possess, and the fictitious puffing of shares which go up like balloons till the prick of a pin brings them down collapsed and empty. All that stock-jobbing, all that robbery legally organised, and in which proudly participated men who held the first rank, decorated, honoured, flattered, *Maires* of their districts, deputies, Ministers, quoted amongst the persons of distinction, at all public or private ceremonies, and every day increasing their fortune, by virtue of that celebrated adage: "*Les affaires, c'est l'argent des autres.*" All this traffic, which seemed to have the forest of Bondy for its veritable theatre, overwhelmed her with stupor.

With her talent for dramatising everything, she perceived, through the golden clouds of financial illusions, the innocent, the sincere, and the honest, who, having exchanged their money for shares, see in a giddy fluctuation, their stocks at first go up then down, to become often of no more value than the price of the paper. She pictured the ruin of the

unimportant and the *naïf*, for the benefit of the prosperous, the shrewd, and the powerful. She heard the cries—despairing, furious, and agonised—of the dupes, whilst the music of a master-piece at the opera lulled the robber, peaceful and smiling, in his box on the first tier.

Jean laughed, and reproached her for being sentimental and old-fashioned—

"You talk like the reasoners in the obselete dramas of Pixérécourt and Dinaux. With a light tremolo from the orchestra, the tirade would produce a great effect upon the impressionable bourgeois of the Marais. Get rid of these prejudices, good for narrow minds! Finance, you see clearly, in our days, is an incontestable power. It is finance that governs the world, and is the arbiter of the destiny of nations. If its organisation was not as marvellously perfected as it is, do you think that a country would be able, within four-and-twenty hours, to find means to borrow the hundreds of millions of which it stands in need? Finance is formidable, you say, and that is true. But all that is useful may be injurious; and no institution moves on without inconveniencies. The engine which draws the thirty carriages of a train, and, in twelve hours, conveys from one end of an empire to the other,

hundreds of passengers, whose commercial activity is increased tenfold by that swiftness of locomotion, can it not crush the imprudent *cantonnier* who ventures upon the line, and is it not also liable to run off the rails, and to kill those whom it ought to bring safe and sound to their destination? Are railways less admirable for that? And must we, for a few accidents, regret the diligences?"

He reduced her to silence, but he did not convince her. And she instinctively rebelled against this fabulous drainage of the property of the greater number for the benefit of a few. She thought that the financial train in which Jean was travelling, and which sped along with appalling rapidity, might indeed run off the rails, as he said. And then it would be downfall, destruction, death! She knew that Jean had staked his entire resources in that Bénagoa speculation, which was directed by Nuño. And the great banker's sovereign capacity for dabbling, which would have reassured the most timid as to the success of the speculation, dismayed her. Her terror would have been far greater if she had known that Sélim, as if to incite de Brives to follow him still further, had given him facilities by becoming responsible for him. But she was ignorant of it.

She dared no longer impart her fears to Jean. Excessively nervous, highly excited, he flew into a passion when she appeared to lose confidence. He had commenced a game of such importance that he desired to feel his hopes shared. And the slightest contradiction put him beside himself. Lise procured financial journals and read them eagerly. She found so many contradictory statements in them that she no longer knew what to believe.

Some asserted that the whole of the shares in the mines of Bénagoa had been snapped up by the shrewdest speculators, and predicted, for the end of the month, a certain rise of three hundred francs. Others affirmed that the shares were fluctuating, and that the rise was produced by the operations of a few great bankers, who, at a given time, would realise their profits and would pass on the bundle of stocks to the dupes who believed in the future of the affair. Finally a small pamphlet, drawn up by some enraged *Boursiers*, and printed with vitriol, threw cart-loads of insults at the "scoundrels who had spread a report that there was no copper in the mines of Bénagoa, that, perhaps, even there were no mines." It insinuated that "these blackguards, not having been able to obtain from the promoters shares below the syndicate figure, were endeavouring now by

hideous *chantage* to extort by force what they could not procure by other means."

In this chaos, Lise did not succeed in discovering the truth. But it seemed to her that she was present at the loading of a frightful infernal machine, destined to make thousands of victims.

However, the foretold fluctuation in the stocks had commenced. Bénagoas rose steadily. And, when passing before the Bourse, from the *Bureaux des Omnibus*, to the extremity of the iron fence, one could hear the uproar of the contending parties and their war-cry, "Bénagoa! Bénagoa!" which, in the distance, and amidst the clamour, reached the ears in another form, curtailed to that howling of a wild beast, "oua! oua!"

They bought them, they sold them, and, from mid-day till three o'clock, forced up, sent down, making prodigious bounds. Bénagoas advanced from five to six hundred, and at the close of the Bourse were still rising, still guided by a mysterious and powerful hand, which communicated to them an upward movement. Jean, maddened, as if engaged in a mortal combat, arrived at the earliest moment, left at the ringing of the bell, and bought with passion, with frenzy, saying to himself—

"Let them reach eight hundred francs, and I sell!"

At this price he would clear enormous differences, and could henceforth live in tranquillity, if he had a taste for an idle life. If he had a fancy to attack large enterprises, he would be in a position to advance boldly, without having to fear that an unforeseen check might fling him to the ground. He had transports of frantic joy at the thought of the anticipated result that he looked upon as near at hand and certain. He said to Lise—

"We shall be rich, and we can then live in happiness without alloy."

She replied—

"Is it necessary that you should have so much money in order to be happy, and are you not quite mad to risk your present good fortune? Be content with what you have, and do not wait till to-morrow."

He did not listen to her; he was a prey to a kind of delirium. He had caught a glimpse of the source of a golden river, and he desired to plunge into it. He was like the alchemists who pursue the great work, and who, disdainful of the pure metal, squander it lavishly to succeed in producing false gold. Money, bank notes, had no longer any value to him. He

crumpled them scornfully in his hands, and gave them for Bénagoas. His ambition was abstract: he dreamt of a certain figure. He was wild to attain it; resembling the tourist who gazes at the peak of a mountain, and says to himself, "No matter how, I must set my foot up there!"

This fever lasted for three weeks. The fortnightly settlement was successfully passed, and towards the end of the month they were still going up with renewed impetus. Lise had besought Jean to pause. She foresaw a reverse. But he became angry—

"What can you fear? It is Nuño who guides the market, and all the great bankers are with him. It is true, that a syndicate has just been formed to oppose the rise, but it will be crushed! The rate of eight hundred is expected by everyone. At the end of the week we shall have reached it, and then I shall realize! Do not speak to me again of this business, I beg you—you trouble me, but you will not succeed in persuading me to let go my prize."

And fearing to have offended her, he took her in his arms and bantered her merrily, using the argot of the speculators—

"Mademoiselle Lise Fleuron," said he, "you are a very charming woman. *Mais vous manquez absolument d'estomac!*"

The rehearsals were pushed on, and they had already begun to set afloat the fourth act. Lise consoled herself for her troubles by working at her part. On the stage she forgot everything, and, growing animated, she essayed effects that she had prepared at home, and acted as if before the public. She had the spirit of those thorough-bred horses, who become excited and run away in their trial gallops. Her eyes flashed, her voice took glorious intonations, her nerves were strained, and, quivering with emotion, she was amazed at the indolence of her comrades, to whom these studies were not, as to herself, a pleasure. La Barre, radiant, saw with absolute confidence, the epoch of the first performance draw near. The interpretation was excellent. And, with the exception of Pavilly, who rehearsed inwardly, and with the aspect of a man condemned to death, the whole *troupe* seemed ready to perform with spirit and with perfection.

Amiable, polite, modest, Claude had made himself liked by the *artistes*. Between two acts, in the moments of repose, he followed with lively curiosity the little intrigues which were ripened and unravelled in the *coulisses*. There was a disagreement between Mortagne and Fanny Mangin. The jealousy of the *jeune premier* had ended by provoking the pretty

girl. The actor had taken it into his head to persuade Fanny to dismiss the Marquis Bévignano!

The preceding evening there had been a terrible quarrel. Mortagne, when going on the stage, before the curtain rose for the third act, had perceived the great Italian nobleman, at the back of the small latticed box reserved for the management, and which is immediately over the stage. He walked off quite pallid, and addressing Rombaud, he exclaimed—

"If that man sits there to stare me in the face, I shall not be able to play! Let him go away! Tell them to make him leave! He comes here to insult me. I cannot answer for myself!"

Rombaud tried to tranquillise him, to make him understand that the marquis, having paid for his box, was at home. But Mortagne, his face distorted by fury, losing his red and white complexion, which dropped off in flakes, repeated—

"Tell them to send him away! He has no right to be there. He comes to insult me!"

"But he does not know one word about your relations with Fanny," cried Rombaud. "He is here from curiosity. . . . He wishes to have a view of the stage during the *entr'actes*. . . . He has paid for his box! Do you hear me? He has paid for it!"

Then the actor, with a reminiscence of the great scene when Kean insulted the Prince of Wales from the stage, made a terrible gesture, and exclaimed—

"It is well! Then, wait a little—you will see!"

"*Ah ça!* Mortagne, no stupidities, do you hear? The Commissaire of Police is here quite close, and I, in the first place, if you cause the slightest scandal, I will fine you five hundred francs! *Ah! mais . . .*"

The *jeune premier* had softened down, he played his three last acts with the aspect of a wounded lion, and, after the performance, he tried to prevent Fanny from leaving with the marquis. But the latter, irritated, turned her back to him, saying—

"Have you twenty thousand francs a month to give me? No? Then go by the servant's staircase and leave me in peace!"

And, from the commencement of the rehearsal, Fanny affected to coquette with the good-looking Trincard, and to consult him about investments that she wished to make. Mortagne, pale, impatient, shaking his superb head, walking to and fro at the farther end of the stage, cast, in passing, contemptuous glances at the red-haired beauty. Lise had just finished playing; she seated herself in order to hear the conversation of her comrades, and the words of

Trincard, talking with Fanny, reached her ears. The actor was giving a lecture on finance. . . .

"No! Suez is worn out, there are no more large differences to be made on that. . . . Railways are heavy. . . . The Spanish are liable to fluctuations. . . . The *vrai coup* is on Bénagoas. . ."

Lise rose. So this cursed Bénagoa pursued her even to the theatre. In the midst of her work, that menacing name was sounded in her ear. Was the whole world involved in that odious speculation? Down to Trincard, who, with a salary of eight thousand francs, had the *coupé* of an eldest son, and lived like a millionaire. Yet she was a little reassured. As unanimous opinion was favourable to the investment, it must be that, in reality, it was good. She promised herself to interrogate Michalon. Although he did not occupy himself with business, he was well known in the world of the Bourse. There were at his club at least twenty brokers, *remisiers*, or agents, whom he must have heard talking, in the salon, in the fencing-room, and by whom he might be accurately informed.

The following morning, during the daily drive in the Bois, Jean and she fell in with the giant, who was trying a new horse. Under the pretext of seeing it caracole and shy, Lise asked to alight, and walked

in the acacia alley. The horse was wilful and refractory. Jean gave advice to his friend. Michalon, becoming impatient, said to him—

"I should like to see you on him!"

"Well! mount him," said Lise, smiling. "Get off, Michalon! We will see the professor at work. . . ."

Jean took the whip from Michalon, sprang into the saddle, and began, with the skill of an accomplished horseman, to make the animal go through his paces. Lise, filled with a joyous pride, followed him for an instant with her eyes, then, turning to Michalon—

"You must be acquainted with Jean's affairs," said she. "What do you think of his situation? I am very anxious. . . It seems to me that, for the last few weeks, he has launched himself very imprudently. . . ."

"I am the greatest ignoramus in the world, *ma chère* Lise, in all that relates to financial questions. . . . I cannot even tell you the meaning of differences. . . . I am of your opinion—I think that Jean goes a little too fast. . . . But what will you? He has always succeeded. . . . He has a blind confidence in his luck. . . Often, in former days, when he gambled, on seeing him

drawn into a heavy loss, I have begged him to give up the game. . . He sent me about my business, persisted against all prudence, and, in short, he was right, for he always ended by recovering, not only what he had lost, but by winning a large sum."

Lise raised her blue eyes to her friend, and, with an adorable smile—

"Was he loved then as I love him?"

"Ah! indeed, no!" cried Michalon. "He never troubled himself about women. He found them embarrassing and absorbing. . . His heart was closed, like a strong box. . . It was necessary to see you to open it! And, *ma foi*, if the proverb is true, I really fear that, being so fortunate in love, he will be unfortunate at play."

Lise pressed his arm with anguish—

"Do not speak thus. . . We must not even admit that it may be possible! . . . Here he is returning. . . . Act like myself, *mon bon* Michalon—exhort him to prudence! But not a word of that which we have just been saying! . . If he knew that I had confided in you, he might perhaps be vexed. . . ."

The horse, submissive and graceful, obeyed the hand of Jean, setting down his feet in cadence, arching his neck, shaking his delicate head. Lise

and Michalon approached. At the same moment a carriage, coming from the direction of the Pré Catelan, passed near them, and framed in the window they perceived the bronzed face and the white hair of Nuño. He smiled, bowed, and drove on. But on his features Lise fancied that she could discover an expression of sardonic joy. It seemed to the young woman that the Portuguese was triumphant at having succeeded in his designs, and that the vast trap set was about to close upon Jean, upon herself, and upon the unhappy people who had allowed themselves to be caught by the delusive bait.

She pictured Sélim as an enormous and frightful spider, lurking in the centre of his web, and coldly awaiting his victims. A terrible thought passed through her mind. She suspected that Nuño menaced Jean on her account. He did not hate de Brives; he hated the man loved by Lise. He wished to ruin him, and, with him, all those innocent ones who had put a hand into the gear of that formidable machine for grinding men and fortunes.

She had a vertigo. She deemed herself responsible for all the misfortunes that she foresaw. She asked herself if it was not her duty to entreat the monster to pause, whilst it was still time, and to flee

from Jean, to sacrifice her happiness to the safety of him whom she adored.

"What ails you?" asked Jean, seeing her absorbed.

She did not answer. The carriage proceeded along the Boulevards, and in the direction of Rue de Lancry. The circulation was obstructed at the corner of the Rue Dorout, and Lise, amidst the groups of pedestrians, heard a newspaper-seller who was calling in a rasping voice—

"The latest crash! The downfall of Bénagoa! The collapse of foreign finance! Ten *centimes!* Two *sous!*"

She grew pale. That cry was answered in her heart. She turned to Jean and said to him, "Do you hear?"

He looked at her with calmness, and, smiling—

"It is the *Scandale Parisien*, that vile journal crammed with false reports. . . . Yesterday, it announced the death of the Empress Eugénie. . . To-morrow it will announce the assassination of M. de Bismarck by German Socialists. . . It is a disgraceful traffic! And I cannot understand why the police tolerate it!"

The journal sold, nevertheless, and men full of business paused at the edge of the *trottoir* to read it.

"Buy one, I beseech you," said Lise. "I wish to see what it says about your speculation. . . . If it is false, so much the better! . . . But if it be true? . . ."

Perhaps Jean was as anxious as Lise to glance over the unclean newspaper, for he did not hesitate, and, leaning through the window—

"*Hé!* man. . . A paper, if you please. . ."

The blackguard detached from his packet a sheet still damp from the press, and extended it to Jean, whose two *sous* he put into his mouth, replacing the bundle of journals beneath his arm, and calling in a choked voice—

"The latest crash. . . . Full particulars! . . . Ten centimes!"

With a glance Jean perused the article. It gave the news, transmitted, it said, by telegram, after the close of the Bourse, of an inundation in the mines of Bénagoa, from springs which had gushed out under the pick-axe of the miners. The galleries were flooded, and working had, for an indefinite time, become impossible. The losses in mining-stock were considerable. Very fortunately they had not the death of a single workman to lament. The news of the disaster had been the signal for a heavy fall at Madrid and at Lisbon, and it was certain that the

markets of London, Vienna, and Berlin would be forcibly shaken.

Jean was grave; he no longer desired to joke. If the telegram was correct, the most terrible complications were to be dreaded. If the report was false, the re-action would be enormous, and Bénagoas would not fail to go up with fresh energy. But what to believe? The journal inspired very little trust. Yet the precision of the details was suspicious, and the moderation of the language was unusual. No invectives, no insults. The fact alone, shorn of all comments. The grossest abuse, directed against foreign finance, might be expected from the low imaginations of the vendors, who knew what was required to whet Parisian curiosity.

Before venturing to do anything, it was necessary to obtain information.

"Well?" asked Lise, appalled by the immobility of Jean.

"Well! There is nothing very conclusive," answered he with indifference. "I will see Nuño presently, that I may know what to believe."

He was silent, and the young woman divined the horrible anxiety which agitated him, from the sudden alteration of his features, from the clenching of his hands which mechanically twisted the journal.

Lise stepped from the carriage, her heart full, her eyes supplicating.

"Expect me this evening," said she.

Never before had she offered to go. It was always he who implored her. He understood the torture of that tender heart, his face relaxed, he recovered his smile, and, clasping her hand—

"Be reasonable. If there is a misfortune, we can do nothing. We must only think of getting out of it in the best way possible. Adieu."

She mounted upon the step, threw her arms about his neck, and, in the depth of the carriage, kissed him as if she would never see him again. And, turning her head ten times to look after him, she walked away.

Jean drove straight to the Faubourg St.-Honoré. He rapidly crossed the offices, reached Sélim's anteroom, and inquired for him of Clément. The majestic *huissier*, silver chain on neck, informed him that the patron had just come in, was engaged in business, and had peremptorily denied himself to everyone.

"Even to me?" said de Brives with a cajoling glance.

"Even to the *bon Dieu*, if he were to come down from Heaven," replied Clément.

Jean thought of asking the *huissier* if he had heard anything said about the catastrophe. But he recoiled before those familiarities of the anteroom. And slowly he went back to his carriage. He had himself driven to his club, and there he found everybody in a state of commotion.

The telegram, published by the *moniteur* of false reports, had been read by all and served as food for conversation. There was a cross-fire of assertions and of contradictions, enunciated by people each as badly informed as the other, speaking for the pleasure of hearing themselves, but bringing forward no fact, precise or of a nature to elucidate the question. All repeated that which they had heard related, rioting in that hollow and noisy *papotage* customary with the idle.

Jean listened, said nothing, and, at eight o'clock, went in the direction of the Boulevards. On the *petite Bourse* in the evening, the agitation was violent. The news, not yet confirmed, had already brought about a fall of a hundred francs. Bénagoas were offered at six hundred. The most contradictory rumours were circulating in the groups. The syndicate, they said, was determined to force down the stocks. Nuño was prepared, they replied, to maintain the contest.

Jean returned to the Rue Taitbout, very anxious. He felt the ground trembling beneath him. For the first time he lost his glorious confidence, and admitted the possibility of a check. He did not believe that it could be complete, irremediable. But with his keen Parisian "scent," he realised that the affair had taken a bad turn. He found Lise, already arrived, who sprang to meet him, burning to interrogate him. But he had nothing to tell her, and she sank down, overwhelmed, under the weight of her apprehensions, accumulated for a month, and about to be converted into a terrible certainty.

However, she saw Jean so tortured by suspense that she felt the necessity of cheering him. She became fond and caressing, she calmed his agitation, she chased the clouds from his brow, she made his lips smile beneath her kisses. And, having despair in her own heart, she forced Jean to forget his sadness.

The morning papers gave no fresh information. They merely published the telegram received the day before, and confirmed the accuracy of the details. No conjecture, no prognostic. They reserved themselves and awaited the event. ' Lise went to the theatre thinking that she would see Trincard there. From him she might perhaps discover something.

But the actor had not come to rehearsal. Roberval took the manuscript and read his *rôle*. Lise, with heart oppressed, went on the stage, spoke without knowing exactly what she said. Her body was upon the boards, but her mind had flown to Jean.

At length, at four o'clock, Trincard appeared, pallid, agitated, his hair over his brow, his eyes sunk in their socket, his clothes in disorder. He allowed Rombaud to question him harshly, without answering a word. He dropped upon a stool and looked crushed by trouble. He shook his head sorrowfully, laughed bitterly, as if he thought it cowardly that they should attack him, when he was already so cruelly struck. And Massol, losing patience, having said to him, "But, in fine, what is the matter with you?" he looked at the old actor with a heart-broken face, and in a faltering voice—

"What is the matter with me? The matter is Bénagoa," replied he. "I have a great many shares in Bénagoa! . . . And to-day they have gone down two hundred and fifty francs. . . ."

"*Bigre!*" exclaimed Massol, who had never, in his whole life, set foot on the Bourse, but who was impressed by the magnitude of the figure.

"And there will be a fall this evening. . . .

And there will be another fall to-morrow. . . . I who, yesterday, could have realized such a handsome profit! . . ."

And the unfortunate fellow bewailed his evil fortune. He was no longer the triumphant Trincard, who arrived at the theatre, a rose in his button-hole, his hat tipped over one ear, making his cane whistle through the air, and saying to his comrades, "To-day I have cleared five thousand francs! . . ." the precise sum that they gained in a year, as if to make them thoroughly understand the difference that existed between a prosperous *boursier* like himself, and poor actors like themselves.

"Well! Cut off your arm," said Massol, "to save the rest of your body."

"But do you not suspect what is now taking place?" howled Trincard. . . . "Why, at the present time, the collapse has been so complete that no one will buy. We can no longer get rid of our shares. . . . People would not take them, perhaps at a gift! . . . For only half of the capital has been paid, and the shareholders are threatened by the company with an appeal for funds, in order to reconstruct the enterprise. . . . It is an unheard-of disaster. . . . Impossible to estimate! . . ."

"Yes, but these are gambling debts!" said a voice at the farther end of the stage. . . . "The law does not recognise them. . . ."

But Trincard started up, recovering his full energy and pride. . . .

"To accept the benefit of the law against gambling? Not to pay?" exclaimed he. "That is good for men of the world! . . No! I will meet my engagements. . . All that I possess shall go. . . A little more, perhaps. . . But I think that M. Rombaud will be so kind as to help me. . . And if I require an advance . . ."

"You shall have it," said Rombaud, with a vivacity that drew a murmur of commendation from the bystanders.

And Trincard, unhinged by emotion, again dropped upon his footstool, weeping bitter tears.

Lise, trembling, had not lost a single word that the actor had said. She stood, nearly swooning, leaning her back against a chimney-piece in the scenery, her ears filled with a dull ringing, her lips blanched, her eyes wavering, her arms hanging and listless. Clémence saw her, drew near, and, taking her hand—

"What ails you?" asked she. "Are you ill? . . Shall I tell anyone? . ."

"No! . . Nothing! . ." stammered Lise. . . "Leave me . . I beg you. . ."

She wished to go away, to reach a dark corner, to hide in it her trouble and her pallor. But Clémence, divining a misfortune, followed her, and, full of solicitude—

"Do you feel better? You have had a shock. . . Have you heard bad news?"

Lise did not answer. She gently shook her head. Clémence thought, "It was at the time when Trincard spoke of the fall that she turned faint. Can de Brives have been caught by the speculation?" She shivered with joy. Heavily involved in such a downfall, Jean must be irremediably compromised. The anguish of Lise was a certain proof. She knew what to think of the young man's position, and she saw him menaced. Was this, at last, the opportunity for revenge that Clémence awaited? Was fate weary of favouring her adversaries? And would she be able to hold them, Jean and Lise, at her mercy?

She desired that Lise should continue to think her friendly and devoted.

"You know," said she, "that you may rely upon me. . . . If you are in trouble, do not hesitate to come to me. . . ."

She tenderly kissed her whom she longed to strangle; she lavished on her the most affectionate protestations, with the concealed idea of profiting by her misfortunes to deal her a decisive blow. But Lise scarcely listened to her, she thanked her mechanically, and went to find La Barre. In three words she depicted to him her agony, and informed him that she must hasten to Jean. The *jeune première* being no longer there, the rehearsal was broken off, and, alone upon the stage, in the half darkness, Claude walked to and fro, his head bent, and filled with sad thoughts.

In an instant, as with a prophetic second-sight, he knew the destiny of the two lovers. He saw ruin and dishonour for Jean, despair and suffering for Lise. With deep bitterness, he foreboded that the actress, crushed beneath the too heavy burdens of her griefs, would fail him.

How that irreparable loss would happen, by what concatenation of events, he did not seek to know. But a cloud had suddenly come before the face of the heroine of his drama, ever present to his mind under the features of Lise. He now saw her veiled, and yet she walked, she acted, she was living. Claude, superstitious, was reminded of those apparitions, legendary in Scotland, and he addressed himself

mentally to the mysterious being. He said to her imperiously—"Creature born of my imagination, daughter of my thoughts, show me thy face."

But the unknown woman passed on without obeying. And Claude had only the heart-rending certainty that it was no longer Lise, and that the actress dreamed of, admired, and secretly adored, was lost to his work.

## CHAPTER V.

N the small secluded salon, where the day-light was so mildly sifted through the red silk blinds, the two lovers were together. The clock had just struck twelve, but Jean no longer even thought of going on the Bourse. The struggle had become useless. Bénagoa, crushed by the triumphant sellers, had not rallied since the day before. Jean, seated on the sofa, the back of his head resting on one arm, his glance vague, was with grievous distress of mind, revolving his departed dream.

His losses were considerable. All that he possessed would not fill the gulf of his debt. A sum of eight hundred thousand francs remained uncovered, of which Desvignes, his stock-broker, had sent him the particulars very clearly explained. The

memorandum was lying upon a small ebony table, inlaid with mother of pearl, and Lise gazed with stupefaction at the heavy figures which barely filled half of the paper. Upon that little square sheet there was a fortune.

She dared not interrogate Jean. He had just yielded, in her presence, to a transport of savage despair which had dismayed her. And, tranquillised with great difficulty, he now seemed prostrated. His hand was lying carelessly upon the sofa, she drew near him, and took it in hers. He did not turn away his head. His pallor was more accentuated, his brows were knit. He appeared to suffer horribly. Lise bent over him, and, in a low tone, her lips touching his ear, she murmured the most loving words. He sat silent and gloomy, as if the strength of his will had been broken. She made another attempt to win him from that dumbness which terrified her. A sigh escaped him, and repulsing her—

"Oh! leave me, I beseech you. . . . You trouble me. I wish to hear nothing. . . . I desire to be alone. . . ."

Lise regarded him attentively. A suspicion had occurred to her. Alone! Wherefore? She recalled to mind what he had answered one day, at the *Cœur Percé*, when she asked him what he would do if he

should be drawn into a financial disaster—"I should imitate the sailors who will not lower their flag: I should blow up my ship!" She still heard his voice, she had before her eyes his resolute face when he had thus spoken. . . And the day of the disaster had arrived, the misfortune was accomplished: he must lower his flag, and capitulate in the most humiliating fashion. . . Not pay! For he had not the necessary money to meet his engagements.

Certainly he kept none of that which he had possessed. All the money gained during his nights of fever and his days of agitation had returned to the empoisoned source whence gambling had drawn it. But although his hands were empty, his honour was at stake. And he must at any price extricate himself from that disgraceful situation. He must pay, no matter how, but he must pay.

Trincard had said, "To accept the benefit of the law against gambling—that is good for men of the world! . ." That which a simple actor—one of those men whom the world delights to laugh at, to depreciate, to scoff at, to treat as a puppet without conscience, without shame—would not resolve to do, Jean could not do. But how would he pay? How would he solve the difficulty?

And his terrible declaration always returned to

her mind. She saw Jean half-lying upon the sofa, his head leaning against the wall, hiding his disheartened face. Feeling himself quite lost, he had given up. She said to herself, "He is thinking of destroying himself." And the terrible dream of her happy summer time haunted her as before; he whom she loved, pistol in hand, a ringing detonation bursting out in the silence, and, in the midst of the smoke, the fall of a mutilated body.

She made a gesture of horror as if to chase away the appalling vision. . . . She said to herself—"No! Never! Anything, rather than see him die, driven to it by despair! . . . We must seek a way of extricating him from the abyss, and we must find it. . . ." She threw her arm about his shoulders, drew him towards her, and, speaking to him as to a child—

"Now, listen to me for a moment. Collect yourself, be courageous. . . . Have you well reflected upon your situation? Are you thinking of the way to improve it?"

He shook his head sorrowfully, and, in a curt voice—

"It is impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible. . . . You have friends. . . . Have you applied to them? . . ."

"When one is in debt, one has no friends!"

"What you are saying is wrong. . . . Have you seen Michalon?"

Jean shrugged his shoulders.

"Michalon is not in a position to set me free from the difficulty. . . . By making a great sacrifice, he could, perhaps, give me a hundred thousand francs. . . . And after? I should be no better off! . . . A drop of water cast into a well!"

"And Gamard?" asked Lise.

"Gamard has a *conseil judiciaire*," said Jean impatiently. "And then, is it on our *compagnons de plaisir* that we can rely? As soon as the sky becomes dark, they disappear. . . . They go where there is heedlessness, gaiety, and laughter."

He clenched his hands with fury—

"And I, I shall never laugh again!"

There was a momentary silence. The clock, which had sounded for them so many delicious hours, still continued its tic-tac, now striking sorrowful hours. Jean listened to it for an instant, his nerves irritated, then rose quickly and arrested the progress of that hand which was hastening so rapidly towards the time when he must meet his engagements. Lise called him back to herself, and, in a trembling voice—

"And he in whom you trusted so entirely? . . . And Nuño?"

At that name, Jean's face wore an expression of frenzied hate. He started up, and casting at Lise a terrible glance—

"Nuño!" exclaimed he. "That wretch? To come to my assistance, when it is he who has ruined me? He would have urged me still further, if it had been possible, to make quite sure that I could not succeed in escaping from him! . . ."

And before the terrified Lise, he launched out into threats and abuse, blaspheming with a hideous fury, as if the torrent of invectives which burst from his lips was a relief to his heart consumed by rancour. He told the secret of Nuño's mode of operation, divined by him, the preceding day, amidst the tumult and the imprecations of the baffled speculators. Determined that, if he must lose with one party, he would gain with the other, Sélim had, at the first sinister rumour, faced about. And from a buyer he had become a seller. His orders, flashed by telegram to all the great Exchanges of Europe, had deluged the markets with shares, and, the demand swamped, had brought about that which, up on the Boulevards, was called the "latest crash." The hostile syndicate was triumphant, and Nuño, making a

compact with the conquerors, shared with them the spoil taken from his allies of the day before.

As Jean surmised, that is what had taken place. And he spoke with excitement—

"Sélim come to his assistance? . . . He hated him too much! One word said in time, would have sufficed to save Jean, but Nuño would rather have lost his own money, if that loss would have assured the ruin of him whom he execrated! And he, the idiot who had believed in the loyalty and benevolence of that man, when everything ought to have put him on his guard; his readiness in appearing to oblige him, and, above all, his base passion for Lise! . ."

At these words the actress could not suppress a cry. Then, it was true! It was for her sake! The doubt that she had felt was converted to certainty. Nuño had been implacable to all those unfortunates whom he had just ruined, only because Jean was one of them. He had found the opportunity that he sought of crushing him who was an impediment in his path. And, with frightful tranquillity, he had ground the innocent with the guilty, in the machinery of his great financial intrigue.

"For me! For me!" said she with horror. . .

Jean cruelly did not try to undeceive her. He felt secretly enraged with her whom he had so much

loved. In the depth of his heart, he reproached her for the disaster. At this moment, he regained all his past ideas upon women. And, with the fetichism of a gambler, he thought that it was the woman who, by occupying his mind, by softening his will, formerly strained with unconquerable determination towards success, had led him to his fall. He adored her, that Lise, and yet he hated her. A blind anger, born of his atrocious deceptions, raged within him. That voice, from which he heard so many tender words, exasperated him; those eyes, which had so passionately reflected his loving intoxication, he upbraided them. It was Lise who had been the cause of all. When he essayed, in bygone times, to resist the allurement of his heart, he had a presentiment that she would be fatal to him. And in a transport of injustice, he was tempted to exclaim to her—"It is thou who hast brought me to this!"

And with horrible perception, Lise read all these thoughts in the eyes of Jean. She saw hatred in them. And she pardoned this unhappy being who suffered so cruelly. Fortune, his sole ambition, on the eve of being accomplished, had eluded him. The edifice raised by him with such difficulty, had fallen to pieces. Not only his past and his present were annihilated but, yet more, his future. She went to

him supplicatingly, and she, who had foreseen danger, she, the innocent one, accused herself as if guilty—

"Jean, I implore you, do not turn from me," cried she, with difficulty restraining her tears. . . "Forgive me. . . . I pray you! . . . Do not look at me with those terrible eyes, which cause me so much misery! . . . Do you no longer love me?"

Distracted, despairing, she clasped him to her bosom. And he, softened by that adorable humility, by that sublime generosity, felt his heart swell, and his rage melted into sobs. Lise, pale and sad, soothed him, reasoned with him, pouring over him the balm of her encouragements and consolations. She almost restored him to confidence. After all, he was secured by Nuño's guarantee, nothing proved that the banker had such wicked designs with regard to him. If he used rigorous means, after having urged Jean forward, and having, so to say, associated him in the enterprise, public opinion would judge him severely. Indignant protests were already arising against him from all sides. He had duped strangers—that was bad; but de Brives, his familiar companion! . . . That would be an especially odious action, bearing a resemblance to a premeditated murder. . . . He must not be discouraged. . . .

She entreated Jean to take no resolution before again seeing her. She made him give his word to await her till the evening. And more tranquil, having put aside for a few hours the dread of the horrible and sanguinary catastrophe which haunted her brain, she left him. She determined, as she had contributed to destroy Jean, that she would labour to save him. If Nuño had the young man's destiny in his hands, it was to Nuño that she must apply.

The recollection of what Clémence, the preceding day, had said to her returned to Lise, "If you find yourself in trouble, do not hesitate to come to me." Was not the power of Clémence over Nuño very great? Lise would ask nothing, herself, of Nuño. But she would beseech Clémence. She would find means to interest her in Jean's cause.

And she walked with a rapid step in the direction of the theatre, where the rehearsal would bring her face to face with her comrade. She hastened innocently to offer her rival a more glorious revenge than she could ever have hoped to have. She entered from the Boulevard, traversed the vestibule, threaded the dimly-lighted lobby, and reached the stage, where Rombaud, Massol, and La Barre were conversing in a low voice before the prompter's box. She encoun-

tered Roberval and asked him briefly if Mademoiselle Villa had arrived.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," said the stage-manager. "She is in her dressing-room. . . ."

At the foot of the staircase, Lise felt her heart palpitate horribly. She was a prey to violent agitation at the thought of confiding her torments to a stranger. To open her heart, and to show the love, deep, absolute, which filled it, was it not a profanation? It seemed to her now that Clémence was not a woman to whom she could betray her secret. Instinct warned her that she was going to meet a danger.

She paused in the corridor of the dressing-rooms, hesitating, prepared to go down again. Behind the door she heard Clémence moving about in her room. A cold dew moistened the brow of Lise. She felt helpless, anxious. The thought of Jean, helpless and anxious also, restored her courage. She accused herself of egotism. How small a thing was the confession that she had to make, compared to the advantage which might result from it! Resolved, she knocked at the door.

"Come in," said the voice of Clémence.

The face of the Italian, cold and hard in its perfection, grew animated at the sight of the young

woman. This was the first time that Lise had entered the dressing-room of her comrade. Some grave incident must have unexpectedly occurred.

"Ah! It is you!" said she. "Are they ready to begin? Have you come for me?"

With her clear eyes, Lise looked her straight in the face, and boldly—

"No, we have time. I wish to speak with you. . . ."

"Ah! What is it then?"

"You told me that, if ever I required your help, you would be willing to give it to me. . . . I come to put you to the test."

"Do it, *ma chère*," replied Clémence, who assumed a grave manner.

And, drawing Lise towards her, she made her sit beside her, on the couch.

"I have often heard you say that M. Nuño refuses nothing that you ask of him."

Clémence bent her head. She saw Lise attack a crucial subject. She foresaw that, in one moment, she would hold the young woman at her mercy. She feared to alarm her by the triumphant expression of her joy. She compelled herself to be calm, to be patient. The vengeance on which, for a long time, she had brooded was perhaps within reach

of her hand. She must not let it escape her. She answered in a voice very gentle and a little trembling—

"It is true that Sélim has much affection for me, and has had for a long time. . . . He is pleased to satisfy my fancies, but can it be possible? . . ."

"Well! If you had a fancy to perform a generous action, to aid a poor fellow who is irremediably ruined, if you do not lend him your support, were it to cost M. Nuño a sacrifice of money for the moment—for he would lose nothing, he may be sure—would he refuse you the satisfaction of saving this unhappy one?"

Clémence raised her head, and, enlightened by a horrible hope, incapable of restraining herself longer, eager to know—

"Who is it?" asked she, with an ardour which made Lise think that she had touched her implacable heart.

"It is Jean! . . ."

She had replied "Jean" quite simply, that name summing up to her, the whole world, everything beginning and ending with Jean.

"Jean," repeated Clémence, "your lover?"

"Yes, my lover," repeated Lise with exaltation.

And, inflamed by the desire to convince, she

related to Clémence, who drank in her words as an atrocious poison, their happy time in the little house, under the trees, on the bank of the river; her disquietudes, her efforts to prevent Jean from launching into that speculation which instinctively caused her fear; then the agitations of the last fifteen days; finally, the catastrophe which had burst upon them, like a clap of thunder, overthrowing all in their existence, and compromising the honour, threatening the life of him whom she adored. She took the cold, inert hands of Clémence, clasped them in her own, scorching them with the fire of her fever; she prayed, wept, saying to her rival that she had no longer any hope but in her, and that if, through her influence, Nuño did not consent to spare Jean, not to have him posted as a defaulter, everything was at an end. She depicted her life closely linked with that of her lover. She would die of his death, and the blow which struck him would also strike herself.

Hurried on by her grief, she paid no attention to the sentiments of Clémence. Her eyes were too full of tears to see her infernal joy, when Lise appealed to her pity. Even if she had seen it, nothing would have stopped her. She was prepared to do anything to save Jean. And the more

terrible the sacrifice that she must make, the greater became her ardour to accomplish it.

Clémence, motionless, gazed at her, jealous of the immensity of her love. That creature whom she held in execration was still happy: she loved. What delight, profound, absolute, had paid her, in advance, for so much devotion! But for the favoured, the triumphant one, the day of disasters had at length come. And she would be able, in one single time, to make her expiate all the pangs felt, all the humiliations endured.

"So," said she, in a monotonous voice, "you have both of you come to that? And it is to me that you apply to assist you in extricating yourselves from this difficulty? . ."

She broke into a laugh which appalled Lise.

"The choice is happy, and shows an ingenuous heart," continued she. "Therefore that good-looking fellow, loved by this charming girl, after having lost on the Bourse all that he had, and all that he had not, expects to be freed from his embarrassments by Clémence Villa . . . whom he slighted when she did him the favour of having a caprice for him! And Clémence Villa is to be so generous, in order to please the girl who came, one fine day, into this theatre to take from her her

*rôles*, her success, her influence—in fact, everything! . ."

She had risen, and was standing before Lise, with arms crossed, showing her face, which she had concealed so long as it was necessary to deceive. Her countenance glowed with fury, her eyes were gleaming with hatred, and her mouth was contracted for insult. For a moment Lise remained dumb from surprise. She could only extend supplicating hands towards her enemy.

"*Ah ça!* Then you knew nothing?" resumed Clémence; "or you must suppose me very stupid? But how can I believe that Jean has not boasted to you of having scorned me? . . It was so flattering to you and to himself. . . Scorned—yes, I was scorned! . . I! . ."

At the remembrance of the affront, she felt a more violent rage boil within her—

"And you come to ask me to interest myself in him? You! As if your request was not an outrage the more! Ah! if only because you love him, I would destroy him, if I had the power. But there is no occasion for me to mix myself up in it. Sélim has charged himself with the task, and, you may be at peace, it will be well done. Ah! your lover wished to carry off all the prizes! He ought, how-

ever, to have suspected that there might be risks to run. . . In the game of love he had the advantage, but in the game of money he has found his master. Let him get out of it as he can! . ."

Lise, astounded, listened to Clémence without exactly comprehending what she said. She went to her comrade, seized her arm, and gazing at her with wild eyes—

"But you have not understood me?" said she. "His life is at stake. He will not survive his ruin."

"And you will die, you also?" exclaimed Clémence, sneering. . . . "You repeat yourself, *ma fille*, you have already told me so. . . ."

"There is no question of myself! I think only of him!" replied Lise. "Of him first, of him always, of him alone! You say that you have loved him; how can you rejoice at this misfortune which has come upon him? Has your love turned to hatred?"

"Yes! To hatred, because he loves you; to an implacable hatred, because you defend him; to a deadly hatred, because, rescued, he would return to you, and you would both be happy!"

And each time that she repeated her frightful declaration, she took a step towards Lise. They were so near, the one to the other, that their bodies

almost touched and that, face to face, they appeared ready to engage in a mortal struggle. Lise now understood. Having lost all hope, she was ashamed of her weakness. Anger seized upon her in her turn, and, braving her rival—

"You are a monster!" cried she.

"I know how to avenge myself, that is all! People cannot attack me with impunity!"

"But have you a right to attack others with impunity? It is to you that I owe all the evils from which I have suffered. You caused me to be grossly calumniated by a wretch in your pay, and it is through you that a brave man risked his life, and that blood was shed. Still you were not yet satisfied, you determined to strike me yourself, hoping without doubt that you would be more skilful. And it is by a miracle that I emerged safe and sound from your hands. Was that enough? No! And you are bent upon continuing your work. What do you desire this time? The dishonour and the death of the man whom I love? That is your last combination, your supreme atrocity. And you think yourself sure to succeed? Well! You are deceived. You have taken off your mask too soon. I know now what I have to fear from you, and I will fight. It is my blindness which has, till this time, made

your strength. Foolish that I was, I could not believe you capable of such abominable wickedness. People had tried to open my eyes; I would not see. And I have come to appeal to your generosity, and to offer you an opportunity of showing yourself as you are, without hypocritical smiles and without lying glances! Well, what you have refused me, I will obtain by myself. You desire to destroy Jean: I, I will save him!"

"Try!" said Clémence.

Lise regarded her boldly, and gaining the door—

"I am going to do it."

She went out. Clémence, stupefied, was left alone. She was gnawn by a furious desire to run after her enemy, to seize her and to strike her. Lise had just braved her, insulted her, rendered her blow for blow. When she believed her overthrown, she saw her rise again vigorous and valiant, and recommence the combat. She felt herself powerless and feared to be vanquished. She turned giddy. She opened her window and breathed the cool air. She wished to be calm and to reflect. From her dressing-table she took a water-bottle and moistened her handkerchief, which she passed over her forehead. She thought, "What can she attempt? Where is she going? To whom does she think of applying?"

She felt by instinct that it was to Nuño. Was it not the Portuguese who was master of the situation? It was that she might implore him that Lise had come to her. But if Lise were to see him. . . .

A cynical smile passed over the lips of Clémence. She knew that the banker was not a man to give anything without exacting a return. Could she not then, herself, derive advantage from the request of Lise, and strike her at the moment when she believed herself victorious? This Jean, for whom the young woman was ready to sacrifice everything—to prove to him that she whom he loved deceived him, at the time when he was cast down and crushed! To give him a proof of her desertion, to make use of Lise's devotion to ruin her, and to lend to her sacrifice the appearance of treachery! But how?

She must in the first place penetrate into the projects of Lise. Clémence descended to the stage. The rehearsal was proceeding haltingly, Roberval held the manuscript, and La Barre, philosophically, knowing that the days follow but do not resemble each other, took his share of the bad work that they were doing, thinking that they would make up for it the following morning. He was sad, however, not having seen Lise. She, punctuality itself, had crossed the theatre, and had not since reappeared. He strove

against his presentiments, but the certainty of never again seeing the actress, upon that stage still vibrating with her success, grew stronger in the depth of his being.

Clémence went quickly down to the lodge of the stage door-keeper and found him manufacturing, by means of strips of stiff green cloth glued around stalks of brass-wire, artificial plants, destined to figure in vases upon a terrace, in the third act of *Les Viveurs*. A tortoise-shell cat, sitting on the table which served for meals, was purring at his side, and, in a room at the back, one could hear his wife beating clothes.

"Have you seen Mademoiselle Fleuron leave?" asked Clémence.

"At this very moment. . . . My wife went to get a *fiacre* for her. But sit down, Mademoiselle Villa!" . . ." said the *concierge*, who held the actress in great estimation on account of the profits he made through her. . . . "Élisa," cried he, "Mademoiselle Villa is asking 'after' Mademoiselle Fleuron. . . ."

"She has just gone," replied his wife, who entered, a slender rod in her hand. . . . "She was quite upset. . . ."

"I know it. . . . It is that which troubles

me. . . . Do you know where she was going?"

"She told the driver, 'Faubourg Saint-Honoré.' . . . It was a small yellow *fiacre* . . . from Urbaine. . . . It started like an arrow. . . . They had given her fresh horses . . . they went well!"

"Thanks," said Clémence, cutting short the gossip of the door-keeper's wife. "I will try to find her."

There was no longer any doubt; Lise had gone to Nuño. What to do? To ask mercy for Jean, from a man by whom she knew herself loved. Was she willing to play *Marion Delorme* off the stage, to try to soften Laffemas, and to pay with her beauty the ransom of Didier? To carry off the banker from Clémence, and to save her lover, what a glorious *riposte!* But was Lise capable of planning that skilful manœuvre, which presented itself quite naturally to the mind of the Italian?

"*Eh!* What does it matter to me?" thought Clémence, "let her take Sélim, provided that I have the proof of it! I am now rich enough to do without him. And then, she would not know how to keep him. . . . A *pleurnicheuse!* She would weary him at the end of eight days, and he would return to me."

While walking, she sought a means to ascertain all that was then taking place at Nuño's. Like all courtesans, sprung from the mire of the Faubourgs, and who have a longing for their original gutter, she had become attached to her maid, a Marton de Belleville, a pretty girl, but corrupt to the marrow, such a person, in fine, as Clémence had been, and remaining in service, till she should amass a sufficient sum to enable her, with comfortable surroundings, to launch out, in her turn, into *galanterie*.

While awaiting the moment to fleece the masters, she coquetted with the valets. She was tenderly intimate with Sélim's confidential man. In the servant's hall they love each other as in the *salon*, and, with the aid of that cunning hussy, bound to her by greed of gold, Clémence knew many things which Sélim believed to be secret. A great financier is no more a hero to his *valet de chambre* than is a great man. Nuño's Le Frontin severely criticised his master, speaking of him as "*cette vielle canaille*," in the same way that Clémence's La Marton said of her mistress, "*cette grue*." Nevertheless, cringing and obsequious, as was proper, in the presence of their employers, and devoted by the help of a large salary.

Clémence again became cheerful. Thinking of

her spy in petticoats, she said to herself, "I have what I want." Then, having arranged her plan of battle, deeming that rapidity of execution might insure its success, and troubling herself no more about the theatre, where Roberval was rehearsing in her place, than about her lost purity, she had herself driven to the Avenue Hoche.

Lise was, in fact, going to Nuño. What to do? as Clémence had asked herself. The young woman did not know. She only knew that on Nuño Jean's destiny depended, and she went to him. The reception that she met with from Clémence had driven her to this attempt. It is better to address one's self to God than to His saints. Clémence was not much of a saint, but Sélim was a kind of god, terrible as the Baal of Babylon, whose worship was defiled by human sacrifices—a monstrous and formidable incarnation of gold. It was to him that she was hastening to beg for the honour and the life of her lover.

It was three o'clock when she arrived in the courtyard. She saw upon a marble slab this inscription: *Entrée des Bureaux.* She ascended to the first floor, amidst a crowd of goers and comers, silent and in haste, and, finding in the spacious vestibule the office-porters seated at their tables,

she asked to speak with Monsieur Nuño. They looked at her with amazement. But she was very pretty under her small white veil, and her eyes disarmed the jeering ill-nature of the underlings. One of these functionaries, in a green coat with gold buttons, deigned to rise and to say to the young woman—

"Is it on business?"

And, as she answered "Yes"—

"In that case, Madame, have the goodness to come with me."

Pushing open a swing-door fitted with panes of ground glass, he showed Lise into a small room wainscoted in light oak, the wall of which was perforated with latticed *guichets*. Above each of them one could read: "Inquiries," "Contested Claims," "Running Accounts," "Coupons." The porter tapped at the *guichet* for inquiries, behind which a grumbling was heard. Then the brass plate that concealed it was raised, and a sulky face appeared—

"You desire, Madame?"

"To speak with M. Nuño."

"But he is not here! Who brought you to us, Madame? That idiot of a Grégoire again! . ."

Lise cast at the *employé* so sweet a glance that

he drew aside the green curtain which lined his wire-work. He admired the charming woman, and suddenly became obliging—

"Stay, Madame; go into the passage, turn to the left, and walk on straight to the farther end till you . . But no—you will lose yourself. . . I will show you the way."

He opened his door, and, loaded with thanks by Lise, who believed herself saved, he guided her through a labyrinth of galleries, then indicating with his hand a last corridor—

"At the end, down there, you will find the waiting-room. . . But I doubt whether you will be received. . ."

He bowed and withdrew, leaving Lise anxious, but resolved to do anything in order to penetrate as far as Nuño. She could now measure the vastness of that man's power. She was in his kingdom, in the midst of his subjects. Like a formidable tyrant, screened from every peril, in the depth of his mighty stronghold, he set at defiance the threats and lamentations of the ruined—he did not even hear their sobs and cries.

She reached the room where the solemn Clément, silver chain round his neck, was walking, amongst twenty solicitants, seated upon the leather-covered

sofas. Lise, stared at by all these first occupants, felt herself ill at ease, she who was accustomed to support the gaze of the public. However, she addressed herself to the *huissier*, and asked to see Nuño. Then there was quite a scene. "The banker was engaged; impossible to disturb him. . . . Madame saw; they had been waiting since mid-day. . . . And perhaps he would not receive before five o'clock. . . . If Madame would take a seat, she would see him in her turn. . . ." Then Lise, in a broken voice, tried to make Clément understand that it was a question of the gravest affairs, and which did not admit of delay. . . . If M. Nuño knew that she was there, he would receive her immediately. And she compelled herself to work upon the *huissier*, to win him by her all-powerful grace. He, troubled, undecided, ended by saying—

"If Madame will give me her card. . . . I will venture to take it to Monsieur. . . ."

But Lise had no cards with her. From the table she took a sheet of paper, wrote her name, *Lise Fleuron*, and handed it to Clément. He read it at a glance, and his face became immediately very gracious, he smiled and bowed slightly. The prestige of the actress was apparent. He opened a door and

disappeared, leaving the young woman exposed to the ferocious looks of her companions in waiting. . . . Then he returned, and, speaking in a very low tone—

"If Madame will take the trouble to follow me. . . ."

Lise, her heart bounding, sprang up and went out, pursued by murmurs of exasperation.

In a small *salon* adjoining his cabinet, Sélim was standing, holding in his hand the paper on which Lise had written her name. He walked heavily to meet her, made her sit down, and, his dull eyes brightening with a sudden flame—

"What has given me the pleasure of seeing you?" said he in his guttural voice. "Have you any transactions in shares?"

"Alas! Not I," replied she, "but someone who is dearer to me than myself."

The fire of Nuño's glance died out, beneath his heavy wrinkled eye-lids, and his face became hard as bronze.

"Ah! Ah!" exclaimed he. "You have come to speak to me of Jean de Brives. . . . An event much to be regretted! He went too fast. . . . He has made me lose money. . . . For it is I who pay! . . . Desvignes has come to

inform me. . . . That fellow is mad. . . . And, madmen, one treats them with severity!"

He began to laugh spitefully. Lise shuddered. She stretched out her hands.

"I implore you, *Monsieur*, do not destroy him! . . . If you knew how grateful I should be!"

The eyes of Nuño again grew bright. He bent towards Lise—

"For you," said he, "I would do much. . . . As to him, I own to you that he does not interest me. He was inevitably bound to do as he has done. I said to you, 'Distrust ineligible young men! . . .' You did not listen to me. . . . 'Ineligible young men' commit follies, and bring pretty girls such as yourself to trouble and grief."

He rose, with a pre-occupied air—

"But I talk. . . . I talk, and my time does not belong to myself. I have a board of directors in there. The most important issues are in question. . . . Be so kind as to return to-morrow. . . ."

"To-morrow!" cried Lise in despair. . . . "But to-morrow it will, perhaps, be too late! Oh! I beseech you! . . . Hear me! . . . Let me prove to you. . . ."

"What?" said Nuño, harshly. "That he does not owe me eight hundred thousand francs? . . ."

She sank back as if crushed, and uttered a piteous moan. Tears streamed from her eyes.

"How you love him!" said Sélim, filled with a sombre envy.

"Yes!" escaped from Lise in an accent so sincere and so tender, that it made the Portuguese tremble.

"Well! Come again this evening then. . . . But not before ten o'clock! . . . If you knew what affairs I have on my hands at this moment! . . . I shall barely have time for dinner. . . ."

"This evening? But it is impossible," said Lise in great distress. . . . "He expects me. . . . If I do not go, he is capable. . . ."

She shuddered. And, in her most caressing voice—

"Does it require so much time to grant a favour? . . . Take a pen and write . . . there, see. . ."

"Eh! *ma chère petite*, it is not so simple as you think . . ." replied Nuño, enchanted. "And then, we must have a little explanation, you and I. . . ."

In the banker's cabinet, the murmur of voices arose; the door was partly opened, and someone, who did not show himself, said, "Monsieur Nuño."

"You see; they are calling me. . . . At

seven o'clock, shall you be at home? I will go there, if it must be."

"But," stammered Lise, "what shall I say to my mother? No! no! It is impossible!"

"Then come and dine with me!"

And, as she remained confounded—

"Are you afraid of me? Bring any one you like, if that will reassure you. . . . But how to speak of all that you desire before a stranger? . . Now, *ma chère* Lise, have confidence in me. Gratify the fancy of an old man, who will be happy to see you alone with him for an hour . . and who, in return, will do much for you. . ."

The young woman remained standing, irresolute. A painful combat took place within her. "Oh! I am a coward," thought she; "I hesitate . . and I can save him! . ."

"You may believe, Mademoiselle," said Sélim, with gravity, "that I know what respect a good and generous child such as yourself deserves. Accept without fear. You will be treated by me with as much consideration as if you were my daughter."

Two tears stole down the cheeks of Lise. She took Nuño's hand.

"Thanks. I trust to you, and I will come. . ."

"Trouble yourself about nothing. You will find

a carriage at your door. . . Adieu. . . I must leave you . . for every instant that I spend with you may cost me very dear. . . And with economy I shall be better able to say 'amen' at once to all that you ask me. . . Go out this way: you will meet no one."

However, if Lise left no stone unturned in order to extricate Jean from his terrible situation, he did not himself lose all hope. After the departure of the young woman, he went to his stockbroker to try to obtain from him time for payment. But he found Desvignes completely maddened. He had been let in on many sides, and for heavy sums. There had been a terrible scene with his partners; his position in the enclosure was menaced. And, furious with those who had baffled his prudence, he had determined to spare no one. Yet the case of de Brives was peculiar. Nuño was responsible for him, and to all Jean's offers he had replied—

"See Nuño. It is he whom this concerns. I shall do as he directs me. If he wishes to give you time, I will give it to you, but if he wishes to push matters to extremities. . . ."

Jean turned his back on Desvignes, and without waiting to hear a word more, he withdrew. He was already weary of imploring. Till then, treated as a

favourite by destiny, he had not the habit of genuflections. With anger he cast a backward glance at the road travelled over since the day when, at the age of twenty, he had begun to battle with life. For a long time he had been victorious. All, both men and things, had yielded to his will. He had nearly reached the large fortune that he desired. At the moment of touching it, foot-hold failed him, and now he was down without hope of ever being able to rise again. He had dared to encounter the rudest antagonists, had gained the upper hand by a miracle, renewing the combat incessantly, and had ended by believing that he was invulnerable. Then, in one day, the defeat had come, complete, irreparable, and he lay stricken down, bruised, his back broken. Should he drag himself painfully along, and give to those who had known him happy, proud, triumphant, the spectacle of his decadence? It would be better to disappear.

In one instant, his life had taken another aspect. He was obliged to renounce the elegant and costly luxury of an idle man. He must find a situation which would permit him to exist. And whatever work he might undertake, he would not succeed in meeting his liabilities. He would bear the burden of a dishonourable debt. He would have failed in

his engagements and must everywhere lower his head. He must shun his late companions, in order to avoid the distressing alms of their pity, or the insult of their disdain. What was he worth by himself? Nothing. What had they sought in him? The man of the world, the daring gambler, the merry guest. It was then ended. He had fallen into a state of poverty which freezes all sympathy, and from which the greatest devotion shrinks. It would be better to disappear.

The consolatory and peaceful image of Lise passed before his eyes. She, he was sure of it, would not forsake him. But how could the existence of the young woman harmonise with his own? What tie could exist between Jean, poor and deserted, and Lise, flattered and brilliant? He would be compelled to stand aloof, not to follow her to the theatre, to accompany her no more to the *fêtes*. He would be an embarrassment to her. And if she consented to sacrifice everything to him, it would be a reproach to him. The world would say that he was living at the expense of the actress. It would be better to disappear.

He made up his mind. He was not afraid of death. What was that short anguish, at the moment of pressing his finger on the trigger of a

pistol, compared to the long agony that the future promised to the *déclassé?* He would not again see Lise. What was the use of inflicting upon himself the torture of saying adieu to her? He would write her a line. He would offer to her, as a last bouquet, all the flowers of love with which his heart was filled. And he would go down into the silence and the obscurity of death, leaving to Lise the *souvenir* of the Jean proud and smiling, the only one that she must remember.

He slowly walked along the Boulevards, inhaling that air which appeared to him so sweet, regarding that animated and changing spectacle which seemed to him so beautiful, and, as six o'clock struck, he returned home. He walked round his apartments, and his eyes were attracted by a letter placed on the table in the salon. The envelope bore no stamp. He took it mechanically. The address was in the delicate and flowing writing which betrayed the hand of a woman. He broke it open, glanced over the first lines, turned pale, drew near the window, and with a horrible pang, read that infamous note to the end: "Whilst you are in despair, she whom you love is consoling herself. She dines this evening with Sélim Nuño. If you wish to have the proof of what I tell you, be at eight o'clock before

the steps of La Madeleine." At the end, no signature.

Jean passed an ice-cold hand over his forehead. He suffered horribly, and realised, in one moment, that he was still attached to life by very solid bonds. He uttered a cry of anger, and, crushing the letter between his fingers, he cast it from him with violence.

Lise! After all that she had said to him that morning, after her assurances of love, her protestations of devotion! And with Nuño! He thought, "It is impossible! It is a base slander!" And he did not hesitate to accuse Clémence of it. He detected that wretch by her implacable rancour against a fallen man. But she lied! And Lise was incapable of betraying him vilely, treacherously, at the terrible hour when his honour and his life were at stake! Lise? No! no! It was false!

He walked about his room with agitation. Yet, how was it that Clémence accused Nuño? Why select Lise as the accomplice of that man? Was it the refinement of wickedness, and to render Lise more infamous, by showing her occupied in deceiving Jean with the man who had ruined him? Or was it the anger of a woman from whom her lover is taken? But in that case it would be true!

Jean thought no more of dying. He was a prey

to jealousy, for a frightful doubt began to take possession of him. He had seen so many of these women with tender hearts, with heavenly voices, with pure brows, suddenly fall into vicious courses, still more tempting through their innocent manners, more alluring to despicable *roués* such as Nuño!

Yet a mocking voice spoke within him, the voice of his scepticism, which said, "In supposing that she is deceiving you, why do you now excite yourself? Did you imagine that she was yours for ever? Is there an eternal passion in this inconstant and variable world? You loved her in her youth, in her beauty, in her brilliancy: be satisfied, and see in this treachery a salutary aid in crossing the step which separates you from the slumber without dreams. You will carry no regrets away with you, and you will know beforehand that she is consoled. Now, be firm! Look coldly on human miseries. And do not let yourself be troubled, at the last moment, by that slight, fragile, and deceptive nothing which is called a woman!"

But to this voice another replied, weeping and lamenting, that of his love, which bewailed the treason, and desired to know the truth, even should an increase of anguish and of sorrow be the result.

Between them he hesitated, contending, unhappy.

He sat down before his table, and began to write a note filled with ironical reproaches. He tore it across without finishing it. In the darkness, which began to fall, he found himself alone, frozen and dreary as in a tomb. He wished to escape from that horrible and depressing sensation. He rose, said aloud, in reply to his thoughts—

"Oh! I will know!"

And, taking his hat, he went out.

## CHAPTER VI.

IT was eight o'clock, night had fallen. The day had been burning, and across the sky the clouds swept, tempestuous and threatening. Long files of carriages, driving down the Boulevards in the warm steam which arose from the watered macadam, passed with an uninterrupted and sonorous roll before the Place de la Madeleine. The flame of the gas-lamps shone pale in the darkness, and the windows at Durand's, brilliantly lighted, seemed to screen colossal feastings behind their glass panes. The *bureau des omnibus* was besieged by the crowd. And, on their arrival, the large vehicles were stormed by bands of passengers who climbed along their sides, black and silent, like enormous ants, accompanied by the sound of the conductor's

bell. Upon the pavement, before the blazing shop-fronts, pedestrians circulated, smoking and trailing their canes, casting a glance at some pretty girl who paused with curiosity before the display of a jeweller or of a *modiste*, and strolling in the direction of the *Cafés-Concerts* in the Champs-Élysées, where the whole of the brass instruments were raging beneath the canopy of the tall trees already despoiled of their leaves.

In this suffocating evening, Jean walked feverishly up and down before the bronze gates of the church, the spot which had been indicated to him, indifferent to the surrounding movement, inattentive to the spectacle before his eyes, thinking of the infamous accusation brought against Lise, and asking himself if it could possibly be true. Doubt had taken possession of him. He had forgotten all, the love of the young woman, her disinterestedness, her exhortations, her prayers. Having always seen desertion become the sequel to ruin, he dared no longer believe that Lise was immovable in her fidelity.

He suffered much, and in his brain he revolved projects of vengeance. He saw the young woman with Nuño, and a sharp pang pierced his heart. He paused then, his eyes fixed, absently gazing at the

carriages which succeeded each other without intermission. He stood motionless, speaking to Lise in imagination, and reproaching her harshly. He determined to know the truth; he had a frenzied desire to surprise her, and, clenching his fists, he murmured threats and violent words. Then, suddenly, a fair head, limpid eyes, a smiling mouth, appeared to him, and to his pacified soul, a delicious ray of light penetrated, too short-lived, and very soon clouded by the bitter reasonings of his experience.

Was she unlike so many other women whom he had seen pass from the lover ruined and soured, to the lover wealthy and joyous. They all did so, even the best of them; it was a necessity of their existence, a fatal temptation resulting from their condition. But it was in vain that he gave reasons to himself, to excite his philosophy, to steel himself against sorrow; the wound of his love bled, and he could not suffocate his cries of despair.

No, Lise was not like the others. She was good, devoted, sincere, and being so, he would only suffer the more by her desertion, he would only curse the more her perfidy. She who, a few hours before, was exhorting him to resignation, to courage, making him swear to take no extreme resolution, was she lying then? Her tenderness, her sadness, were they

only an odious comedy, the better to deceive him? Ah! he must, *coûte que coûte*, know what to believe. He would await the anonymous denouncer, he would brave the atrocious joy of Clémence, if it was she. He would go anywhere, he would do everything in his furious desire to unmask that Lise whom he now loved a hundred times more at the thought that they were striving to take her from him.

Half-past eight was just striking. Seeing the time glide away, Jean thought, with agitation, that perhaps no one would appear at the *rendez-vous*. He suspected an unworthy mystification, an abominable deception. He was already recovering his belief in the innocence of Lise, when a hand placed upon his shoulder made him turn round, and, with grievous emotion, he found himself opposite a woman. A thick black-lace *mantilla* shrouded her face. He stood hesitating. The woman divined what was passing within him, and, quickly, she drew aside the folds of lace. Jean had not deceived himself: it was Clémence.

"I suspected that it was you who had written to me," said he, with bitterness. "You pursue without pity that unfortunate Lise. . . ."

"*Eh! mon petit*, you are a fool! Do you think

that I am going to let Nuño be carried off without resistance? He has one of the longest purses in Paris! *Elle n'y va pas par quatre chemins, l'enfant, et elle a bon appetit!* . . You know that she is there? . ."

With a gesture she indicated to Jean the windows of the *restaurant*, which flamed out into the night.

"It is the betrothal dinner!" added she, with irony. "Shall we go, both of us, to upset the table?"

Jean did not answer. Each of her insulting words had wounded him cruelly. Instinctively he felt himself impelled to defend Lise. And then he no longer wished to know, he feared to ascertain the truth. He was ashamed.

"Will you come?" repeated Clémence.

"No!" said Jean.

The Italian seized his arm, and sharply—

"You are not curious, *mon cher!* I thought you a man. But I have been mistaken in you. . . Your mistress is there with another; you have but one step to take to surprise her, and you hesitate? . . ."

Jean shuddered. "With another!" And that other was Nuño, the wretch to whom he attributed his disaster. It was, indeed, too much! He was

seized by a cold fury, and, walking towards Clémence, he said—

"Let us go!"

In a small *salon* on the first floor, the walls hung with paper in imitation of Cordova leather, the furniture covered in dark-brown velvet, lighted by two gilded, eight-branched candelabra, Nuño and Lise were dining *en tête-à-tête*. Clad in the same woollen gown that she wore in the day, not having wished to put herself to the trouble of dressing, in order to show clearly to the banker that it was to a *rendez-vous* on business she had come, and not to a *rendez-vous* for love, the young woman, pensive, refusing every dish of the sumptuous repast ordered by Sélim, listened sadly to the banker.

She had well reflected before making up her mind to go. Returned home, the fever which had led her to Nuño becoming soothed, she realised the dangers incurred by the execution of the promise that he had extorted from her. Nuño was one of those men with whom a woman cannot show herself without being compromised. It would be sufficient for people to see her with him, were it only in crossing the Boulevard, for them to say the following morning, "Do you know? Lise is Nuño's mistress!" She was not ignorant of it, and yet the thought of

the peril in which Jean was, led her on. Between the evil that might happen to herself, and that to which her lover was exposed, she did not hesitate: she sacrificed herself.

Yet, to save Jean, did she not risk dealing him a very cruel blow? If he were to hear of her adventure with Nuño? But how should he hear of it? He was to remain in the Rue Taitbout that evening; he had given Lise his word to await her there. She dreaded nothing but from him. Who else would be capable of recognising her under the large mantle and the thick veil that she would wear?

And still a vague fear, indefinite but persistent, troubled her. It seemed to her that she was threatened with misfortune. A presentiment spoke aloud within her, telling her not to go. But he, what would become of him? The situation was inextricable. He was at the end of an *impasse*, and, to emerge from it, he must have either time or money. Money he had none, and time, Nuño alone could give him, this Nuño to whom Lise feared to go.

She said to herself, "I am a coward. What have I to fear from that old man? He has promised to treat me with respect. And besides, in that public place, where it would be sufficient to ring, to call, in order to bring people. . . ." She stood erect,

full of confidence, she felt herself young and vigorous. The stout Sélim, with his white hair, his ponderous and massive figure, appeared to her, and she could not refrain from smiling. Could he try to constrain her? Moreover, why should she wrong him by supposing that he had the thought? In fact even if there should be danger to incur? Was it not necessary? What merit would she have if, to save Jean, she risked nothing?

Nuño's carriage drawing up under her window, with a precision which revealed a valuable horse, driven by a skilful coachman, put an end to her uncertainty. Lise said to herself, "*Allons!*" The little black spot, that had dwelt in her mind, as a cloud, foretelling a storm, lingers on the horizon, suddenly disappeared, and the young woman no longer felt anything but a strong and mighty desire to attempt her utmost in defence of him whom she loved. She said "adieu" to her mother, who allowed herself to be kissed with an impassibility almost spiteful, and her heart beating, she descended. A dark *coupé*, without arms or monogram, was waiting at the door. Lise saw in this precaution taken by Nuño, the fulfilment of the promises he had made, and with renewed confidence she stepped in.

Nuño, impatient as a bridegroom on the evening

of his marriage, had arrived early. Concealed behind the window, he watched for the coming of Lise, agitated, boiling with anxiety, trembling with nervousness, and enjoying one of those emotions of a young man for which he could never pay too dearly. When he saw the carriage stop, and Lise alight from it, he felt profound satisfaction. Measuring, with his experience of a *viveur blasé*, the intensity of the sensations produced upon him by the young woman, he said to himself, "For me there is in this world only that girl! She must belong to me, she must let me live in the radiancy of her charm and of her beauty. I will win her, no matter how, no matter at what price!"

The fancy that he had for Lise, like a conflagration which has been smouldering for a long time, assumed in one instant tremendous proportions. He longed for Lise with the violence of a last caprice. He felt himself capable of anything, in order to gain her; of crime, of submission, of kindness, of corruption, of tenderness. The most antagonistic feelings clashed in his heart. If it were necessary to marry her, he was ready to get a divorce. But, before all, he relied upon the mighty influence of his money.

Seated opposite her, gazing at her with his large

eyes, beneath their heavy lids, he tried to win her from her sadness, but did not succeed in bringing a smile to her lips.

"I will do all that you wish," said he. "You have only to command me. But, I beseech you, throw off that unhappy air. A charming girl, such as you, is not expected to have cares and griefs, and if you trust in me, I will spare you all trouble for the future. Do not receive in a bad sense what I am saying to you. You well know that I take the liveliest interest in you. I tried to make you understand it four months ago, at that supper of the hundredth night, when you were so beautiful and so brilliant, but you would not listen to me. You had your head and your heart caught by that little de Brives who could only lead you to your ruin. Those young men, do you see, are all egotists, they do not love a woman for herself, striving to make her happy and to give her everything that she desires. They only love her for themselves, and she must bend to their whims, to their caprices. They excite great passions; there are foolish women who kill themselves for their *beaux yeux*. And they are proud of it, and it gains them a reputation in the world. It is better, believe me, to cast your eyes on some reasonable person who would assure your welfare, lend assistance to your

career, and strengthen your success. You gave yourself, *mon enfant*, to an ineligible young man, in spite of my advice. You see where that has brought you. . . . I pray you, be wise. . . . Let us imagine that the four months which have just passed are a dream during which you were very happy. But the dream is ended, you must return to reality. . . ."

He stopped at seeing the young girl's eyes filled with tears. The grief of Lise agitated him. He besought her not to weep. He was beside himself, and felt prepared to make the greatest sacrifices so that he might restore its joyous expression to her sweet face. He again became young, impassioned, confiding, generous.

"Let us see, Lise, what do you wish me to do for this fellow whom you still love so madly? You desire that I should not claim the money that he owes me? I consent to it!"

"Oh! Monsieur! How good you are!" cried Lise, clasping Sélim's hands with gratitude.

"I am not good," said the Portuguese in his rough voice, "but I have a great affection for you. . . . Here is the account of the debts, settled, give it to M. de Brives, he will pay when he is able; or, he will not pay at all. . . . But that is not

enough, he must live. He has nothing more of his own. . . . I will give him a post in my house. . . ."

Lise shook her head and said gently—

"That is impossible!

"Impossible, in Paris, yes, you are right. But if I get him employed by one of my correspondents in London, for example? . . . For you understand, *ma chère petite*, that after the misfortune that has befallen him, he must leave for a little time. He will be obliged to change his mode of life. It will be better that he should go abroad. . . ."

"Then I shall see him no more?" murmured Lise with sorrow.

"It must be," repeated Nuño. "I will make every possible sacrifice, but he must leave. He would ruin you, do you see. . . . Those *beaux-fils*, you cannot imagine to what they may lead a woman. . . . Oh! He is bound to go away. . . . Delicacy commands him to do it, and what is more certain, I will not allow him to stay. . ."

"But if he should refuse?" asked Lise with a last hope.

The swarthy face of Sélim became menacing.

"I will make that my affair! . . . As to you, *ma chère enfant*, let me defend you from your

enemies, and cause you to triumph over them. I know all that has been attempted against you. . . . Those who shall henceforth try to injure you will have to reckon with me. . . . Accept me as your friend, your adviser, your second father. I only ask for the delight of seeing you, of conversing with you, of hearing you sing and laugh. I am an old man; you will be my daughter. . . ."

Lise remained silent, thinking with bitterness that Nuño was already exacting a recompense for his generosity. Nothing for nothing; that was the rule. And yet, he had done, at the request of Lise, that which very few people, even those as rich as himself, would have consented to do. He asked the young woman for her society in exchange. . . . Could she be surprised at it? He even put into his prayer, an unexpected humility and gentleness. It was not the creditor, strong in his right, who said, "They are in my debt, let them pay me!" It was a good man, timid and suppliant, who implored a very slight favour, hardly availing himself of the advantage he might have taken. Had Lise imagined that she would obtain facilities for Jean, without some cost to herself?

Nuño wished for her, not actually perhaps—he let her understand that—but morally. She would not

give herself, but who would believe that she had not done so? The semblance of the fault would ruin her as surely as the fault itself. Submitting to the kindness, the attentions, the assiduities of Nuño, she would pass, in the eyes of all, for his mistress. There would be less disgust, but as much shame. At that idea, she revolted. Her heart swelled with proud honesty, and boldly regarding Sélim—

"Listen to me attentively, Monsieur Nuño. You are disposed to treat M. de Brives favourably. That is indeed kind. But, perhaps, you are not sufficiently exempt from responsibility, in the misfortune which has overtaken him, to have the right to be very rigorous. Do not compel me to remember that it is you who involved him in that affair from which you emerge intact, whilst he remains in it ruined. Finally, do not lose sight of this, that I am not a woman likely to accept a bargain such as that which you propose to me. If you wish for my friendship, begin by deserving it, without conditions. . . ."

"Oh! do not speak to me so harshly," cried Nuño in great distress. "I will do all that you desire, but do not reproach me! *Mon Dieu*, what influence you have over me! You have but to speak and I obey you. . . . Ah! I indeed knew that

you were the only woman in the world for me! And I would have done anything to bring you nearer to me. . . . Yes, anything!"

With dismay, Lise recovered her impression of the preceding days, when she pictured Nuño setting in motion his machinery for grinding human beings, and when she fancied she heard their cries, their sobs, their prayers. She saw before her, calm and smiling, the author of these atrocities, and he owned them, he almost made of them a claim for her love. She was seized with a violent horror of this monster, she would not remain a moment longer with him.

"I have your word?" said she.

He stretched out his hand to her; with hesitation she put her own into it, and shuddered at feeling upon her flesh the lips of Sélim.

"It is signed," said the Portuguese.

She rose and looked for her mantle. . . .

"What! you are going so early? Why, it is barely half-past eight."

"I must. I am expected."

"By him?"

"Perhaps."

Nuño stifled a sigh. However unfortunate Jean was, he still envied him.

"When shall I see you again?"

"When you will. Come to the theatre."

"But you are not playing."

"I shall play in fifteen days."

"Must I wait so long? At least, come to my office. Bring me your little savings. . . I will increase them a hundred-fold in a very short time. . . . But I must see you. . . ."

"And Clémence?" said Lise, smiling.

"Oh! do not speak to me of her!" cried Nuño, with animation. . . "All that is at an end. . . If you knew what she is! . ."

He was about to relate everything. The door of the *salon* opening brusquely cut short his words, and she whom he denied so completely, appeared, followed by Jean.

"Thanks, *garçon*," said Clémence, with tranquillity; "it is, indeed, here!" And, closing the door, "Pardon us for intruding at your little party. But, *Monsieur* and myself, we find you rather egotistical! You would have done well to invite us!"

Jean stood motionless, speechless, gazing at Lise, and asking himself if it could be possible that it was she. The young woman, her eyes enlarged by terror, vaguely sought an outlet, ready to precipitate herself into space, to take refuge in death, that she might

escape from that terrible sensation caused by the gaze of Jean, fixed upon her with horror.

Nuño was the first to regain his *sang-froid.* He rose with a violence that shook the table.

"Why do you come here?" cried he, in a rough voice.

"To see that flower of innocence and purity dining *en tête-à-tête* with you," rejoined Clémence, pointing jeeringly at her rival, pallid and trembling, half fallen back upon the sofa.

Lise started up with a bound, and, springing towards Jean, her hands extended, her eyes overflowing with tears—

"Jean," cried she, "let me explain to you. . ."

She could not continue. The contemptuous smile that she saw upon the lips of her lover arrested the words in her mouth. And, with a terrible moan, hiding her face with her hands, despairing of convincing him, she again sank down.

"My money was not sufficient for you, it appears," then said Jean, turning towards Nuño, and, with voice and glance, hurling at him an insult. "You also desired to take from me my mistress. . . . To a man as skilful as yourself, the one was not more difficult to appropriate than the other! . . ."

"You dare to reproach me," exclaimed Sélim, "when, to my prejudice, *vous me faites un pouf* of eight hundred thousand francs? . . ."

Jean, beside himself, marched upon the Portuguese.

"Scoundrel!" said he, "it is you who have robbed me! And, if you were not an old man, you should pay dear for what you have just said!"

Sélim moved his head, as if to shake off the insults that Jean had launched at him, and, coldly—

"After such words, I might limit myself to having you turned out. . . . But you accuse unjustly and odiously that poor child who, in truth, is worth more than all of us. . . ."

"Hold your tongue!" exclaimed Jean with fury. "That which most surely condemns her is to be defended by you."

"You must think us remarkably stupid, *mon vieux*," said Clémence laughing, "to tell us idle stories of that kind!"

Nuño did not reply. He pointed to the door and said—

"Go!"

And, as Jean remained motionless, his eyes fixed upon Lise, who was weeping, forgetting all, buried in his despair— . . .

"Will you compel me to summon assistance?" asked the Portuguese with anger.

"It is unnecessary. . . ." replied de Brives scornfully. "I know all that I wished to know; I will retire, and leave you together. . . ."

He began to laugh, coupling with a gesture of contempt Nuño and Lise—

"A prostitute and a thief! You are worthy of each other!"

Nuño did not reply, but Lise could no longer support that excess of injustice and outrage. She started up, and, glowing with energy, radiant with indignation, protesting with all the strength of her being—

"Oh! unhappy wretch!" cried she, "you accuse me, I, who am only here for your sake—I, who have had this evening, nothing but your name on my lips—I, who have borne all in your interest, and who was ready to sacrifice all, even my honour, even my life, so that your honour and your life should be safe! And you accuse me! And you come, led here by that creature, an accomplice of hers, to threaten me, to insult me, despite my supplications and my tears! In one instant, you forget all the certainties of the past, in order to see an unfavourable appearance, and to believe it! In return for all the love that I

have dedicated to you, you do not give me the alms of one minute of confidence! This is then your love! Such a feeble ordeal as this it cannot resist! Ah! I blush at having so long adored you, at seeing how little worthy you are of it!"

Carried away by the fervour of her wrath, Lise, her eyes flashing, her lips trembling, her hair in disorder, spoke with an irresistible power. Jean, agitated, stood motionless. Her voice had penetrated to the lowest depths of his heart, and had aroused its slumbering memories. He felt shame, he took a step towards the young woman. But Clémence was watching him, and, seeing him lose his self-control—

"Well played, the scene," said she with a sardonic laugh; "very well shaded, the tirade! My word, at the theatre they would have been taken in by it! But, *dites donc, mon vieux* Sélim, from all that I can gather, you are still rather a good fellow! You consent to interest yourself in M. de Brives, and to arrange his little affairs, that you may give pleasure to Lise? . . . As to you, *mon cher* Jean, I do not dwell on the *rôle* which they give to you. . . . You are acquainted with *Monsieur Alphonse*, I suppose? . . ."

On seeing her intentions so frightfully travestied, Lise uttered an exclamation, and made a movement

to throw herself upon Clémence. The Italian, dazzled by the glance of her rival, was terrified and recoiled. Carried on by the impetus of her action, Lise seized Jean by the shoulders, and her eyes in his eyes, she cried to him—

"Is it she or myself whom you believe? Answer! One word is sufficient."

Jean was tempted to clasp in his arms that woman whom he adored in spite of his fears, in spite of his doubts. He was upon the point of replying to her, "It is you who speak the truth, I desire to believe you, and if I deceive myself, I am still happy in my illusion." He saw before him, Clémence, who was laughing spitefully, he saw Nuño silent and waiting. He would not appear so weak, and with a gloomy face he turned from her.

"Ah! Go away! You are too base!" exclaimed Lise.

She repulsed him with convulsive strength, and falling back upon the sofa, she remained dumb, tearless.

"Adieu, my little loves," said Clémence staring insolently at Nuño. She approached him—

"I told you not to get up any affairs in my theatre! . . ."

Then, speaking to de Brives—

"I think that we have nothing more to do here. We are in the way! Let us go!"

At seeing her lover leave with her rival, Lise felt something break within her. She sprang forward, crying yet once more—

"Jean! . . ."

But the door was already closed. And it seemed to the young woman that her heart had been crushed by the insensible wood which separated her from him whom she loved.

In the passage, Clémence took the arm of Jean, who was walking beside her, unconscious, yielding to his despair and to his anger. She bent towards him, and with her most engaging smile and her softest eyes—

"*Mon cher ami*, we are each as unfortunate as the other. But it depends on ourselves whether the laughers shall be on our side. . . . Shall we avenge ourselves?"

Jean, restored to himself, dropped the arm that the Italian was resting upon his own, and looking at her with eyes filled with scorn—

"You are more hateful to me than she is!" said he. "Lise may be unworthy. . . . But you? . . . Oh! You! . . ."

He began to laugh hideously, and, with a gesture

repulsing Clémence, who became livid from anger at seeing her hopes frustrated, he walked away not turning his head.

In the salon, Nuño and Lise were alone. Deep silence reigned, broken only by the quick step of the waiters in the corridor, and the rattling of silver being moved. Out of doors, the huge omnibuses passing upon the Boulevard, shook the ground with their heavy rolling, and made the crystal glasses and bronze candelabra vibrate on the table. Nothing was changed. Upon the white cloth the covers carefully laid presented the commonplace splendours of plate and massive china. The two guests opposite each other, spoke no more but followed with trouble their distressing thoughts. Lise, her head resting on her hand, her eyes tearless, her lips compressed, was seeking within herself a last hope, a supreme illusion, and found only an immense grief, heart-breaking, without remedy. Her happiness had fallen, and amongst its ruins, she tried to discover a trace of her past joys. All had disappeared and was for ever annihilated.

Nuño, afflicted, feeling that he ought to address a few words of encouragement to Lise, knew not what to say, and, for the first time in his life, was embarrassed. He thought, "Between that little de

Brives and herself, everything is now at an end. We must hope so at least, although women are so *bizarres* that they never cling more to men than when the latter have treated them brutally. But, *fichtre*, he said more to me than his money is worth! . . . I must, however, speak to that poor child. . . ."

"Lise . . . *mon enfant*. . . . Now be calm. . . . Lise! . . . I entreat you, do not make yourself ill . . . Lise! . . ."

She slightly raised her head, appeared to return from a far distant dream, and gazing earnestly at Nuño—

"How did he know that I was here with you?" said she harshly. "Who has betrayed me?"

Sélim was astounded. He had not even thought of asking himself how it was that Clémence had been so promptly informed of his *rendez-vous*.

"Who had an interest in ruining me?" continued Lise, with violence.

And as Nuño rolled his large eyes, beginning to understand—

"Yes, who? If not you?"

"I!" cried Sélim, starting up with astonishing vivacity. "I! Ah! Lise, you cannot think what pain you give me. To suspect me, when, at the

price of a fortune, I would have spared you this grief! . . . You are ungrateful! . . . I implore you, tell me that you believe me! . . . What must I do to convince you? On what shall I take an oath? On the Gospels, the Bible, the Koran? No! . . . Upon you, who are dearer to me than my children! . . . But tell me that you believe me. . . ."

He was beside himself, and continued with vehemence—

"Oh! in truth, I had, in former days, culpable projects. I confess it to you. . . I determined to use artifice and bribery to obtain your favour. . . But you have completely changed me. . . I should now have blushed to employ such means with regard to you, so pure, so sweet, so tender! Oh! I respect as much as I love you. It is that vile Clémence who has had you watched. . . But I will never see her again! . . ."

With disquietude he drew near Lise. The pallor of the young woman had increased. A dark circle surrounded her eyes, and her mouth twitched pitifully.

"She has attained her end, she who hates me," said Lise, slowly, as if she had difficulty in unclenching her teeth.

"You are suffering, Lise," said Sélim; "you must go. Let me take you home."

"No."

"At least you will make use of my carriage, which is below."

"No."

"Can I do nothing for you?" asked Nuño, in despair.

"Nothing."

With a distracted air she put on her mantle and her hat.

"I will not let you go in this way. You terrify me; you are not well. . . . Some misfortune might happen. . . ."

She looked at him with her blue eyes, which had become of an alarming fixity—

"I forbid you to follow me. . . . The misfortune has come! . . . Adieu! . . ."

She left the room, descended the stairs, and went out upon the Boulevard. The weather, which, during the whole evening, had been threatening, had changed to stormy. Large drops of warm rain fell at intervals. The wind blew, and, in its sudden squalls, swept up with clouds of dust the leaves of the plane and chestnut trees. Lise felt it pass deliciously over her burning brow. And, care-

less of the blast, she went straight on at random, plunging into the black darkness, and burying herself in it, as if she desired never more to emerge from it, and return to the light of day.

One thought prevailed in her brain, bitter and discouraging, that of the uselessness of her sacrifice. She had compromised her honour, risked her tranquillity, and hazarded her happiness. And all was to no purpose. Jean, convinced that she had deceived him, was in greater despair than before. To sustain him he had no longer that supreme consolation, the love of a devoted and faithful woman. He had lost all, in one single day, and he would no more hesitate to seek death.

Lise moaned, and tears flowed down her cheeks, mingling with the water from the sky. It now rained very fast, but she still walked on with that step, rapid, jerking, and uncertain, which is the gait of the mad. Her clothing was wet through, and she was not aware of it. She carried in her hand a small umbrella, but had not thought of opening it. She found herself in the Champs-Élysées, and crossed it without dread of the prowlers who strolled around her, casting to her as she passed words that she did not even hear. She reached the Quays, and went down as far as the Pont de la Concorde.

She paused there an instant, and leaned her elbows on the parapet, gazing at the lights reflected in the water which flowed under the arches with a dull sound. In the darkness she took pleasure in hearing the murmur of the passing waves. She fancied that she could distinguish sweet and consoling voices which called her. From the deep shadow, extending beneath the bridge, arose a cool fragrance that intoxicated her. Giddiness imperceptibly stole upon her, and her eyes could no longer detach themselves from one bright and rippling eddy. It seemed to her that the water of this gleaming whirlpool was gradually mounting to herself. She saw it tempting, cool, ready to engulf the fever which scorched her blood. No more despair, no more grief, no more anxiety. If, on that tempestuous night, Jean were to die, she would disappear with him. And the surface of the river was rising slowly; she had no longer an effort to make in order to plunge into it. The enchanting murmur of its waves sounded more seductively in her ears; its silvery ripples fascinated her. She hung over to see better and to hear more distinctly, everything swept around her with frightful velocity, and she felt prepared to fly, as if she had wings.

An abrupt shock tore her from this dangerous

ecstasy. She opened her eyes with difficulty, and found herself in the arms of an old man, and of a woman who examined her attentively.

"Well! *mon enfant*, what was the matter with you?" said the woman. "Without my father, I really believe that you would have fallen from the bridge. Are you ill? You are wet to the skin. You must go home. . . ."

"And above all you must not remain near the river," said the old man gravely.

Lise let them put her into a *fiacre*, gave her address, moved aside the hand of the woman, who was offering her money, and, recovering her anguish with her reason, she looked at the clock of the kiosque on the Place. It was nearly midnight. For three hours she had been wandering in the streets. During that time what had become of Jean? What had he done? Was it possible that she had so completely forgotten him? She had a horrible palpitation of the heart, and the terrible vision of the other night again appeared to her. She saw her lover outstretched, dead, in the small apartment so filled with happy *souvenirs*. She uttered a cry of despair and rebellion—

"No! I will not allow it!"

But what to do? To whom to apply? Michalon

was her supreme resource. She leaned through the window and called to the driver, "Place Vendôme." At midnight, Michalon was always at the club. She regained confidence. Michalon liked her, he would understand her, would make excuses for her, would aid her. She sprang quickly to the pavement, before the façade sparkling with light, and begged the *concierge* to ask M. Michalon to come down to speak with her. . . .

She again stepped into her carriage and waited with impatience, trembling lest an unlucky chance should have sent away her friend. But under the arch she saw the giant's tall figure emerge from the shadow. He came in his evening dress, a little surprised, not knowing who it was that wished to see him. They had said "a lady."

"It is I," said Lise, opening the door.

"You!"

Becoming suddenly anxious he dared not interrogate her. Then with an effort, and his words strangled in his throat—

"Is Jean? . . ."

She interrupted him and, in the same breath, she related to him all that had passed. She was again burning, and her eyes glittered with fever. Her sweet voice was sharp and hissing and her whole body

shivered. But she thought only of her lover. Michalon must go to him, must explain everything to him, must compel him to live. She herself was of little importance.

Michalon, very grave, said to her—

"Let us go to him."

He took a seat in the carriage with Lise, just as he was, without an overcoat, and, on the way, he gently scolded the young woman, making excuses for his friend.

"Yes, she was good, loving, and devoted. But what imprudence she had committed! How not to suspect her? What man could have so much power over himself that he would not be blinded by jealousy and led away by anger?"

She heard him, without replying, seized by great weakness, feeling her thoughts float in her brain, wandering and feeble. She had no longer courage to struggle—she gave up—she was at the end of her strength. When the carriage stopped, Michalon said to her—

"Shall I let him know that you have come with me?"

In dismay she raised herself, and, recalling the horrible scene, still hearing the insults of Jean, she replied—

"No! But if he is here, open the window of the *salon*. I shall be reassured, and I shall go away. . . . Afterwards do not leave him."

"I promise."

He went in. She remained motionless in the depth of the carriage, exhausted by those last efforts, having her heart upon her lips, and feeling acute pains in her back, between the shoulders. She looked at the house, asking herself what terrible thing it hid within its walls. Suddenly one of the windows on the *entresol* was illumined, then was opened, letting her see Michalon, who bent out, waving his hand. Lise gave a sigh of joy, her eyes overflowed with tears. She called to the driver, "Rue de Lancry," and moved no more, absorbed, as if asleep. She had great difficulty in breathing, and her head was hot as a burning coal. And, in the slow, jolting motion of the carriage, she had hallucinations. She fancied that Clémence was pursuing her in the street, and she believed that she saw her wicked face through the glass of the window. She was horribly frightened. She thought, "I am suffering so much!—but she will not have pity on me! For what does she still wish? She has taken Jean from me. She will also have my life. But let her leave me to die in peace!"

The carriage drew up. Lise alighted, paid, rang, crossed the passage of the *porte cochère*, and, dragging herself up the staircase, clinging to the baluster, she climbed up its four flights. Arrived on the landing, she had not strength to take her key from her pocket. She felt that everything was turning around her, and had only time to seize the bell-handle, by which she held, that she might not fall. The *bonne* caught her in her arms, and began to call out—

"Madame! Oh! *mon Dieu!* Madame, here is Mademoiselle. She is half-dead!"

A hollow exclamation was heard in the adjoining room, and the blind woman, guiding herself with her hands, her face stern, appeared. She went to her daughter, felt her clothing drenched by the rain, her hair damp and glued to her forehead, and her burning face.

"*Mon Dieu!* Whence has she come in this state?" asked the mother, in a doleful voice. "Lise! what has happened? . . She does not hear me—she has fainted. We must put her to bed. . . She is very ill! Oh! the unhappy girl! It is to this that she was sure to come, sooner or later! It was in vain that she dissimulated—I knew that there was vice!"

She took her daughter in her arms, raised her with a strength that one would not have suspected in her feeble body, and carried her to her bed. Lise opened her eyes, recognised her mother, and, suppliant, again become a child, she murmured—

"O mamma! I have given you much pain! Pardon, mamma, pardon!"

Then she began to shiver, and lost consciousness. The blind woman undressed her, laid her in her bed, tucked in the coverlets as when she was quite a little child, and seated herself beside her pillow, motionless, hearing, in the silence, the panting respiration of Lise, and cursing the theatre, that hell where she had gone to her ruin.

## CHAPTER VII.

A BARRE seemed to have read the future, when he had the melancholy presentiment that Lise would not play in *Les Viveurs*. The next day the actress did not go to rehearsal, and the doctor at the theatre, who had been sent for to see her, brought back to Rombaud the most alarming accounts.

Lise had been delirious since the previous evening. Pleurisy had declared itself, with the gravest complications in the brain. This was a terrible blow to the author and the manager. On the eve of performance, the piece was deprived of one of its interpreters. And of which? Of the *artiste* who disarmed the public by her grace, who swayed it

by her talent, and who forced success. Without Lise, all would be dark upon that stage of which she was the light.

And Rombaud, having the absolute conviction that good luck had come to the Théâtre-Moderne, brought by the actress in the folds of her mantle, at the thought that she would not be in the new play, fell into a state of deep dejection. La Barre, in great distress, thinking of Lise more than of himself, had in vain tried to revive Rombaud's spirits, to restore him to confidence; he only obtained from him heart-broken replies, and, with bitterness, acquired the certainty that the manager had always relied much more upon the talent of his *artistes* than upon the soundness of the play.

In truth, the drama was interesting and spirited, but what brilliancy Lise's interpretation of the principal *rôle* would have given to it! The fourth act, played by her and by Mortagne, was an assured triumph. Mortagne deprived of Lise, who had the power of rousing him to excitement on the stage, and of making him go off like a bullet from a pistol, would be quite lost without her. Accustomed to each other, they knew their own mode of interpreting a scene, they looked into each other's eyes, and, at once, they set fire to the situation, and, in presence

of the enraptured public, they carried its interest to the greatest height.

Ah! Lise! Lise! What to do without her? Rombaud thought seriously of postponing the play. He sent for Doctor Panseron, and asked him to name, within a few days, the time when the actress would have recovered her health. They might wait till then. It would be a loss to the theatre; *La Duchesse* no longer paid its expenses, they ran through a thousand francs a-day. But anything was preferable to the necessity of playing *Les Viveurs* without Lise. Would it be fifteen days, three weeks? The kind-hearted doctor, who went morning and evening to the house of the sick girl, shook his head sorrowfully but gave no opinion. Only he advised Rombaud, by all means, to take his precautions and to procure a substitute for Lise.

Then Rombaud flew into a passion, and, with that redoubling of his southern accent which was habitual to him in moments of agitation, he asked the doctor of what he was thinking that he should come there to talk such nonsense. How could he replace Lise? Was there a Desclée, in the theatres of Paris, that he could have even by paying her weight in gold? He was ready to engage her, to pay the forfeiture, to do anything. But he well knew these

were idle words. To speak thus—it was just as well to whistle!

Rombaud determined to inquire for himself, and he went to the Rue de Lancry. Reporters to the theatrical journals succeeded each other in the lodge of the *concierge*, for no one was allowed to go upstairs. Twice a day a footman sent by Nuño called for tidings. The Portuguese was in despair; he had broken with Clémence, and declared that, in his whole life, he would never again see that wicked woman. The serious illness of Lise was one of those Parisian events which counterbalance the interest of an important *séance* at the *Chambre*, and cause the death of a renowned general or of a turbulent statesman to be forgotten. At the door Rombaud encountered Jean, wandering around the house like a dog that has lost his master, and reaching the apartment, where he found the bell muffled, he made inquiries of Lise's faithful *bonne*, who, in a low voice, and with tears streaming from her eyes, said to him, "She is not going on well."

"A fever, *mon bon et cher Monsieur*, to scorch her pillow. . . . And a cough which tortures you only to hear it. . . . With that, no means of preventing her from talking. . . . She does not understand when we beg her to be reasonable.

. . . A regular child! Stay! . . . there, it is she rehearsing! *Ah! mon Dieu! Seigneur!* What can we do to calm her, our poor, pretty *demoiselle?*"

And through the partition, Rombaud heard her monotonous recitation, broken off from time to time by terrible fits of coughing. With heart oppressed he withdrew. It seemed to him that the earth trembled beneath his feet. He had no longer confidence in the future.

At the theatre, in spite of the exertions of La Barre and the admonitions of Massol, the rehearsals dragged lamentably. The *artistes* felt that the piece hung on hand, and, sulky, disheartened by uphill work, they no longer made an effort. Clémence, impassive, went with punctuality, and did not join in the conversation of her comrades. She waited, self-concentrated, with a kind of grave reserve, sure of the *dénouement*, and not raising a finger to precipitate it.

Never, during his ten years of poverty, of conflicts, of reverses, and of humiliations, had La Barre endured tortures equal to those which he suffered during these few days. He saw the whole staff of the theatre turning away from him. Those who, in the beginning, appeared full of confidence in the result, now assumed airs of reserve. Those who had

been secretly hostile stood on no more ceremony, and abused the play aloud. Delessard, in his cabinet, where, every afternoon, he was visited by fifty persons belonging to all classes of society, shrugged his shoulders above his ears, and harangued with profound disdain—

"He had divined, at once, he Delessard, that the piece could not hold its own on the stage, and would only be saved by a superior interpretation. The interpretation was defective, and they began to realise the weakness of the action. . . . That little La Barre, who was to surpass everybody, from what Rombaud said, that dramatic genius miraculously discovered, would make *un bon four*, and the world would hear no more of him; he would return to his obscurity with all the masterpieces that he had written! . . ."

And he laughed, with the ferocious satisfaction of a man who for his part has only a third share in the opening pieces, played from complaisance, and to obtain favourable critiques. He whispered to his fellow-journalists, some bitter-sweet remarks upon the embarrassment in which the management of the Théâtre-Moderne was struggling. And, the following day, Rombaud would arrive, exasperated, the journal in his hand, influenced by four lines from the

*Échos de Coulisses* to which he attributed the importance of public opinion, and already picturing to himself the whole of Paris dissatisfied with what was passing in his theatre, and prepared never more to set foot in it.

Pavilly, who did not pardon La Barre for having given him the *rôle* of Castorin, hastened to all the theatres, and could not exhaust his severe criticisms upon the piece.

"They could not dream of anything worse; and the third act, especially, in which he did not appear, would not be ended." He went to find Rombaud, and freely advised him to profit by the difficulties which had supervened and to give up the idea of mounting *Les Viveurs*.

La Barre, exposed to the ill-nature of all, not being able to approach the wings without hearing some uncivil reflection upon himself, did not lose courage. He turned a bold face to the storm, affected an unshaken confidence, and divided his time between Lise and his play. Twice a-day he went religiously in quest of news, and always the same afflicting answer was given, "Very ill." To the immense disappointment of the author, deprived of such an actress as Lise, was joined the deep grief of the man who secretly loved her.

In the small *salle-à-manger* at her modest apartments, he lingered to talk in a low voice with Michalon, listening to the moans of the young girl and her delirious cries. She seemed to have forgotten Jean. She never spoke of him. The man to whom she had given all, had disappeared from her thoughts. It was her part which occupied her. She repeated it incessantly, with an accuracy of memory, and a delicacy of intonation, that brought tears into the eyes of Claude. Then, she became anxious about him. She called him, but when he drew near, bending over her, she gazed at him with her expressionless eyes and did not know him.

Then, full of care, Claude went down stairs, and often, in the street, at the door, he saw Jean, who waited for Michalon, not daring to enter the house, and miserable, consumed by regret, ready to give his life for that of Lise. The author turned aside, affecting not to see de Brives, fearing to be hurried away by his hatred. However the latter, after having hesitated during two days, made up his mind to accost him. And, in presence of his wretchedness, Claude could not be severe. At first he overwhelmed him with reproaches, and ended by pitying him.

On the fifth day, when Doctor Panseron left the

chamber of Lise, his face was still more gloomy than on the previous evening. Interrogated he was silent. But the blind woman who had noiselessly followed him, hearing the silence, divined the anguish of her daughter's friends, and began to wail despairingly, but without a tear flowing from her eyes, in a paroxysm of that noisy grief peculiar to old people and to children—

"My daughter! My poor daughter! She is lost! They have killed her! Oh! I was quite certain that she would die of her *mal de théâtre!*"

And making a sinister echo to the lamentations of her mother, through the partly open door, was heard the voice of Lise, repeating her grand love-scene in the fourth act, and shading with exquisite art the most impassioned phrases, the most ardent invocations to the delights of life, while death was already seated near her bed, within the shadow of her curtains.

That day, when arriving for rehearsal, La Barre found Massol on the stage.

"Have you seen M. Rombaud?" said the old actor. "He was asking for you just now. . . ."

Claude walked towards the cabinet which had seen him, in turn, timid and reassured, uneasy and triumphant. He found the manager there, standing

before the chimney-piece, his hat upon his head, and jingling his keys with more excitement than usual.

"*Mon cher*, the situation in which we are cannot last for ever," said Rombaud. . . . "We must come to a decision. I have thought a great deal about our affair. . . . You know, one allows one's self to be led away, one has dreams concerning plays, one sees them through the interpretation. . . . I fear that we have deceived ourselves. . . . *Les Viveurs* is not perhaps exactly what we have imagined. . . . We must revise it again. . . . Pavilly said, yesterday, that we might perhaps cut out the third act. . . . Played by Lise, it would do. . . . But, without Lise, it seems to me useless, and even dangerous. . . . Think of this. . . . What I am telling you, is in your interest, you understand that!"

"Perfectly," said La Barre, grown cold as marble. . . . "But let me observe to you that the third act is the very central point of the play, and that, in my idea, it is the most important of the five. It is impossible to touch it."

"You think so? All authors are the same! What one asks them to cut out is always the best. . . . But we will set aside that little question. What do you say to an adjournment? . . . Lise

will recover her health, and we will produce the play in the spring, under the most favourable circumstances. . . ."

"Lise will not recover," answered Claude, gravely. "Alas! We shall never again see her upon the stage. . . . As to an adjournment, I will never consent to it. The play is advertised; it is almost ready. . . . To put it aside would be to do me a very great injury. . . ."

"But, *mon cher*, we will explain the matter in the papers. . . . It is a simple postponement. The piece is accepted. . . . Fear nothing. . . . I intend to play it!"

Rombaud was only acquainted with a La Barre, amiable, mild, conciliating. He found himself suddenly in opposition to a La Barre, inflexible, violent, refractory. The future of Claude was at stake. He was prepared to do anything that it might not be compromised. He resisted the manager, parried all his attacks, and succeeded in dominating that vacillating spirit.

"In ten days, I should have been able to give a revival of *Antony*," sighed Rombaud, "and I should save the receipts. . . . But you are not willing. . . . At all events, we must find a substitute for Lise. . . . And, in the theatre, there is only

Clémence Villa who could play her part. . . . And again, she will not be wonderful in it! . . ."

Rombaud had reserved that proposition for the last. He expected a protest from Claude. But, since the preceding evening, the author had realised that painful necessity. And he had made his sacrifice. In the critical pass in which he was struggling, he desired at least to save his work. And, without dispute, he agreed to it, with the stoical rage of a sailor who, in the midst of a tempest, casts overboard a part of his cargo in order to keep his ship afloat.

Rombaud sent to summon Clémence. The actress appeared with the smiling tranquillity beneath which she had for so many days disguised the most violent emotion. The blood rushed to her face; she knew that the hour, so ardently desired by her, had arrived.

"*Ma chère Clémence*, said the manager, "we have just taken, M. La Barre and myself, an important resolution. . . . It is decidedly impossible for Lise to play. You know what a beautiful *rôle* it is. . . . We offer it to you to create. . . ."

Clémence did not move a muscle. She dared not speak, fearing that the sound of her voice would betray her frantic joy. At last, then, she was triumphant! She had again become powerful; they required her.

And this *rôle*, which she had dreamed of seizing, even by means of a crime, she held it!

"You do not answer?" continued Rombaud, amazed. . . . "Does not the offer please you?"

"No," replied Clémence, obdurately. . . . "I know the *rôle* that was distributed to me; it suits me very well. . . . I do not see why I should relinquish it. . . . You told me yourself that the piece would not bring in one *sou* if I played the *rôle* of Lise. . . . I do not wish to ruin you!

"

. "Now, be serious! . . . You know very well that I did not think of what I was saying. . . ."

"No! no! My *rôle* pleases me; I have discovered in it some highly interesting effects; I will keep it! . . ."

She felt a delicious enjoyment in revenging herself for the humiliations that Rombaud had made her undergo. She desired to see him on his knees, he who had scorned her.

"Now, Clémence, be a good girl," said Rombaud; "the question is to render us a service. It is a labour that we ask of you; be it so. Accept it with a good grace."

"I consent to it," the actress ended by saying. "But it is in truth not for you, who have behaved

in so ignoble a manner to me. It is for M. La Barre, whose success I will not allow to be compromised!"

And Claude was compelled to thank this monster who caused him horror, and to find complimentary words when insults were rushing to his lips.

Rombaud, as if desiring to make some one suffer for his dissatisfaction, abused Roberval, who had not commenced the rehearsal, and began to inveigh against the *artistes* who were not yet on the stage. Pavilly arrived, with an air of amazement—

"They were rehearsing, then? What! again *Les Viveurs?* He believed that the piece was given up. What a bore it was, this business!"

He no more restrained himself, speaking within two steps of La Barre. When he knew that Clémence was to play Lise's *rôle*, he broke out—

"That time it was the *coup de grace!* Well! on the evening of the first performance they would receive *les petits bancs sur la tête.*"

Rombaud, very dejected, quitted the stage, saying to La Barre—

"I leave you to preside over the work. You have determined to go through with it. Get out of it as you can."

He left through the passage of the orchestra,

going to the check-taker's office, followed by Delessard, who laughed slyly, applauding Rombaud for extricating himself from the dilemma. And, in the centre of the vestibule, the manager, furious, exclaimed, in the presence of the *sergent de ville* and Madame Seigneur, who was listening anxiously from behind her wire lattice—

"It will not run thirty times! No! not thirty times!"

La Barre, left to himself, redoubled his energy. He felt the whole of this theatre upon his shoulders, and did not despair of bearing it without faltering. It was agreed between himself and Clémence that for the first few days she should not rehearse, except for the gestures and for the cues. Only, La Barre was to go to her house every morning to assist her in studying at home.

Seated in the small room wainscoted in old carved oak, with large Gothic windows adorned by stained glass, Claude listened whilst Clémence went through those scenes that he had heard Lise repeat so deliciously. With stupor, he recognised in the play of the Italian all the movements, all the effects thought out by her rival. Even the inflections of the voice were the same. The attention with which Clémence had watched Lise rehearse

had not been sterile. And, with incredible skill, she imitated her comrade.

It was a prodigious likeness. And Claude, in the mystic half-light of the stained-glass windows, began to imagine that, by an infernal miracle, the soul of the delirious Lise had entered the body of Clémence, and that the genius of the conquered victim was inspiring her victorious persecutress.

This was the reason why the actress had desired not to rehearse with her comrades from the beginning. She feared that at the first reply they would exclaim, "Oh! it is Lise!" She wished to accustom the *artistes* to see her in the part, then, one fine day, she would attack it boldly, and that time they might say what they pleased.

Rombaud, disheartened, no longer quitted his cabinet, and, by dint of saying that the piece would not run, he had arrived at believing it. He had written a disconsolate letter to a renowned author who had promised him a drama, importuning him to send in his work, as *Les Viveurs* would certainly be played no more than twenty times. Now it was only twenty! The tall Bernard, very anxious, hearing it rumoured in all the *foyers* of the theatres that La Barre's drama threatened to be a failure, the author being determined to listen to no advice, and

even rejecting the counsels of Pavilly, had gone to see how matters stood in the theatre. The working of the *claque* had to be arranged, and Bernard always attended the last three or four rehearsals.

He found Rombaud gloomy, feverishly reading manuscripts, and striking with dejection the covers, blue, rose, or yellow, exclaiming—

"Nothing! Not a play, not an idea! The most complete sterility! The old have died out, and the new have not appeared! What will become of the stage? Ah! when I had Lise I scoffed at the weakness of the dramas: she made everything successful. She was the fortune of the house. By following her, I succeeded: she was my star! But now I look in vain—I no longer see the small brilliant light which guided me. No longer anything but clouds!"

Rombaud was moved—became poetical; moreover, he was especially afraid that Bernard would speak to him of his hundred thousand francs!

"But that new piece, *voyons?*" said the leader of the *claque*.

"Bad! bad! without Lise, *mon cher*. . . . One can do nothing with it!"

"I do not admit that a theatre can fall for want of an actress," exclaimed Bernard. "Artistes are

made, *que diable!* . . . However, I am going into the house, I wish to see with my own eyes."

He crossed the stage and went down into the orchestra. The theatre was dark. The foot-lights alone illumined the stage. Bernard, that he might be at liberty to realise the full impression, placed himself upon a bracket-seat, in the obscurity of the passage.

Pavilly and Clémence were on the stage, the actress rehearsed in a low tone, and the actor, irritated, modulated himself by his comrade. With hands in pockets, dragging his feet, rounding his back, in a grumbling manner he muttered his rejoinders between his teeth. La Barre, buried in a *fauteuil*, on the second row of the orchestra stalls, listened, without breathing a word, without making a gesture, exasperated by the odious by-play of the actor. For eight days, he had followed him thus, not willing to hazard an observation. And Pavilly, with malicious pleasure, watched from the corner of his eye the unnerved author, exaggerating his wailing accents, and spreading over his *rôle*, very spirited and full of repartees, a wearisome and depressing monotony. Seeing Claude immovable and impassive, he began to speak in a still lower tone, and his voice, habitually muffled, only reached the house as a faint

murmur. This time La Barre could no longer support it, and standing erect—

"Monsieur Pavilly," said he, with great politeness, "will you be so extremely kind as to speak rather louder? . . . I cannot hear you. . . ."

"You lose very little by not hearing! . . ." grumbled the actor.

"I do not understand you," with calmness, said La Barre, who wished to force the actor to go beyond all bounds.

The affected tranquillity with which Claude had just replied, deceived Pavilly. He believed the author cast down, and disposed to bear anything, when, on the contrary, he was trembling with a wrath suppressed for too long a time. He shrugged his shoulders, and affecting to turn his back to the orchestra—

"The *rôle* is detestable, *parbleu*, that is clear enough!"

La Barre started up quite pale, and his long hair thrown back, his eyes flashing, his hands quivering—

"However detestable it may be, Monsieur," cried he, "it is still a hundred times too good for the manner in which you play it!"

"I!" stammered Pavilly, opening his small eyes.

"Yes, you, Monsieur, you whose ill-will is doubly

culpable, inasmuch as it injures your comrades, who are thoroughly conscientious, and myself, who have a right to expect your co-operation!"

"Monsieur. . . ."

"That will do, there is enough of this!" said La Barre sharply. "The *rôle* annoys you, but you annoy me much more. I will take immediate steps to replace you. . . ."

"To replace me? Me? And by whom?" asked the actor with a contemptuous sneer.

"By the first comer: any one who has a desire to do well will be preferable to you. But we are losing time! . . ."

And bounding on the stage, throwing off his overcoat and his scarf, Claude seized the manuscript, took Pavilly's place, and, enraged, began to rehearse with Clémence. The latter, shaken as if by an electric current, forgetting her resolutions, was carried away by his impetuosity. And suddenly, the play, cold and dead, became living and luminous. It was a marvellous change of scene; a sunrise after a gloomy night.

Now, it was Madame Bréval and Mortagne who played, then Desmazures and Massol, and Clémence came on again for the end of the act, with Fanny Mangin. The movement was accentuated, the

action, impassioned and daring, was rapidly developed. The *artistes*, themselves astonished, redoubled their efforts. The dialogue, strong, vigorous, hurried on. And Claude, standing against the frame-work of the curtain, saw with profound joy his work emerge for the first time from the darkness of its birth, and display itself before his eyes, living, superb, such as he had dreamed it. At length the dangerous cape of preparations was rounded. The play which had for long days floated, hesitating between destruction and safety, emerged from the tempest, and was on the way to reach its haven. Massol approached Claude, and said to him—

"It went well to-day. I am satisfied. . . . But you made Clémence work capitally! She will be better than we could have foreseen! . . ."

Pavilly, himself amazed at the impetus given to the play by La Barre, recovered his good feelings, and said aloud—

"The *rôle* belongs to me, I have learned it. . . I will play it! . . . It will be one more sacrifice that I shall make. . . . *Par exemple*, it will be for the good of the theatre!"

"Eh! Let it be for the Devil, if you will," said Claude gaily. "But play it well! . . . You have talent enough for that!"

And Pavilly, a little consoled, complained to the author of his harshness, affecting amiability, and endeavouring to be restored to favour.

"Now! The second act," said Massol. "Do not let us trifle away our time!"

The second act went off without a hitch, then the third. It was ended: the play was launched. Like a bird, it had spread its wings, and now, in a powerful flight it was soaring in the azure sky. Bernard, in his corner, did not stir, listening with attention, admiring the skilful manipulation of the situations, which went on, becoming stronger and stronger, until the climax at the end of each act. He was caught by it, and alone, breathless from emotion, won by the play, like a *bon bourgeois* who has paid his hundred *sous*, he enjoyed it delightfully and thought no more of his work. The fourth act had just ended. Clémence and Mortagne, panting, were still on the stage, leaning on the table and regarding each other joyously. The door of the lobby opened and Rombaud walked towards Bernard.

"Well?" asked he anxiously, "what do you say of it?"

The *chef de claque* rose, and gazing coolly at Rombaud—

"You do not believe in the play. Well, I have an

arrangement to propose to you: make over to me the first hundred performances for two hundred and fifty thousand francs!"

"You say?" exclaimed the manager not daring to believe his ears.

"I say that you are a fool!" resumed Bernard with animation. "The play is wonderful! . . . Never will you have obtained such a success! . . You will have it for your whole winter. . . . And you are aware that I know what I am about. I have some good advice to give you—it is to make an agreement, immediately, with La Barre, for another drama. . . . That fellow has the genius of the stage. . . . He will have a magnificent career! . . ."

Rombaud was no longer in the orchestra. He hastened to the stage. He had just heard from the lips of Bernard all the praises that he had himself, formerly, yielded to La Barre. What had got into his mind for the last few weeks? What sudden darkening of his faculties had rendered him so blind and so unjust? Yes, the piece was good, he had not been wrong in mounting it! Yes, La Barre had a future! He was quite certain of it! He had been maddened by Lise's misfortune, and he had given way to an absurd despondency. With his habitual

vivacity he passed from an exaggerated distrust to absolute confidence.

He found La Barre behind the scenes, arranging a question of accessories with Roberval, and, drawing him aside—

"*Dites donc*, La Barre," said he, "Bernard witnessed the rehearsal, and he is very pleased. . ."

"And that astonishes you, does it not?" replied Claude bitterly.

"*Allons, mon cher*," continued Rombaud, "be more indulgent to a man who has been worried by the difficulties of a new interpretation, and who welcomes with transport all that presages a success which he has never doubted. . . ."

"Thirty performances!" said Claude, looking at him steadily.

"Forget all that nonsense! One is nervous at a theatre. . . . You know that better than anyone. It appears that you have spoken harshly to poor Pavilly? . . . *Dites-moi, mon cher*, we will mount the play in a superior manner, *hein?* I have some pretty new scenery from Rubé, that I was reserving: I will give it to you for the third. . . . There are a few liveries to order for the lunch scene. . . . That must be *très coquet*. . . . And now the play is ready, do not let us

loiter. . . . I am losing money : I shall not be sorry to gain some. . . . We will put it up for Saturday."

Thus, in one moment, the aspect of the situation had changed. A breath had turned the scale to the side of success, and every face had again become smiling. La Barre witnessed that metamorphosis, and enjoyed it deliciously. The poor fellow had left hell and entered heaven. He forbade himself that immoderate joy, he would not permit himself to hope. He had known so many unhappy hours : he dreaded another deception. But in the depth of his being, he heard the echo of the beloved voice of Lise repeating to him, "You will have a triumph, my good Claude!" And, with poignant grief, he thought that she would not have the happiness of contributing to it.

He quitted the theatre and went to the Rue de Lancry. There also a change had taken place. The delirium of the patient had ceased since the morning, and she had regained consciousness. But the fever, on leaving her, seemed to have carried away her last strength. Exhausted, and in a state of grievous weakness, she was only sustained by her nerves. Doctor Panseron had never been so anxious. He did not know where to find the malady. The attack of

pleurisy was almost cured, but Lise, a prey to a kind of consumption, was dying away, as if her veins had been opened and all her blood had flowed out. He sent everyone from her chamber. A single exception had been made for Claude, for whom Lise asked with a persistency which fatigued her more than the presence of her friend could have done.

She welcomed him with a smile; and, under her curtains, he saw her so wan and emaciated that he stood dismayed. The heat of fever no longer swelled the flushed features of her face. She was white and cold, her eyes half-closed, as if to die. She divined the impression felt by La Barre, and, in a faltering voice, she said to him—

"It is no more than the shadow of Lise, is it?"

He essayed to protest; she moved her head upon her pillow in sign of denial—

"Do not try to deceive me, Claude. To others I say nothing; but, between you and me, there is no hope. . . . They seek my malady. . . . They will not discover it. . . . It is in the heart. . . . I have been struck by a blow which has killed me. . . . Yourself, you despair of my life, because you have given my *rôle* to another. . . ."

Claude grew pale at these words, spoken with a melancholy sweetness that made an icy shiver pass

over his whole body. He wished to deny. She fixed upon him her blue eyes, which seemed to look beyond life. He could only exclaim—

"Who has told you? . . ."

"No one. Whilst I was delirious, I distinctly saw Clémence acting my part. And it was I who aided her to play it, by marking for her all the shades, so that she should not compromise your success. . . ."

And Claude, agitated, recalled to mind the persistency with which the sick girl in the mental alienation of her fever had repeated fragments of his play. He remembered the strange hallucination which had shown him the spirit of Lise going to animate the body of Clémence. And bending his knee before the bed on which that woman whom he adored was dying, and who, like a good angel, protected him still, even when at the threshold of death, he began to weep bitterly. And, in the obscurity of the alcove, holding the hand of Lise, in order to let her know the extent of his grief, with impassioned eloquence he confessed to her his love—chaste, as it was hopeless.

"I knew that you loved me, my dear Claude," murmured Lise; "and it is much to be regretted that I was not able to love you also. I should have

been happy. I should live, and what beautiful *rôles* you would have written for me! Heaven did not wish it. . . . My heart was no longer my own when I again met you. . . ."

She hesitated for a moment. A slight flush faintly coloured her face, and clasping her friend's hand, as if to ask his pardon for what she was about to say—

"And Jean?" asked she.

La Barre became gloomy.

"He comes every day to hear how you are going on. He suffers cruelly. He has not dared to enter your door. . . . But if you wish to see him I will go to find him. . . ."

"Thanks," said she; "you are kind. . . ."

She showed him a small glass suspended from the wall, and made him a sign to give it to her. She looked at herself a great while with sadness, and shaking her head—

"No! I will not let him see me thus. I am not to be recognised! . . . He must keep the remembrance of the Lise whom he knew living and beautiful, and whom he loved."

She let the little mirror fall upon her bed and spoke no more, seeming to sleep. Thus *coquetterie* still survived in the heart of the actress, and she desired to die in a kind of poetic mystery.

Claude left the room on tiptoe, and went to find *la mère* Fleuron, from whom they vainly tried to conceal the condition of her daughter. The blind woman did not answer, but from her sightless eyes tears streamed down her wrinkled face. On awaking, Lise asked for Michalon. She only wished to have with her Claude and himself. She made inquiries about Jean's situation, and heard with joy that the speculation which had cost him so dear would not be as disastrous as it had been at first feared. Bénagoas were again rising. And Jean would be able to meet his engagements. But Michalon fruitlessly asked permission for the unhappy fellow to see Lise, if only for a minute.

"He shall not come into the room, but let him hear your voice, that he may know you forgive him. . . ."

Lise was inexorable. La Barre's play was her constant pre-occupation. She never ceased questioning him upon all that was passing in the theatre. She could not dissemble her regrets. She mourned her art. She had terrible paroxysms of despair, during which she clung desperately to life, imploring Doctor Panseron to save her.

"It is impossible that you can let me die thus, in the height of youth, in full strength! I have so

many grand things still to do at the theatre, and I feel so certain that I should be successful! Oh! to have made thousands of spectators live with one's own life, and abruptly to be no more. . . . To sink down, to swoon, to disappear in the midst of triumph, of applause, to end never to begin again. After having mimicked death on the stage, to see him suddenly face to face—real, definitive! To leave all those whom one loves, and to hear around one sobs which will not be heard the following day! . . . Doctor, your science cannot be powerless. I am courageous. . . . I will aid you. . . . I implore you, save me!"

Then, worn out by emotion, she became resigned, and lay motionless, listening to Claude, who spoke to her of their childhood, of the small garden at Evreux, where, in former days, they played between the box-edged flower borders. And gradually before her eyes a shop, in a narrow, badly-paved street, appeared, over the front of which one read: *Madame Capelle, Modes et Lingerie.* It was evening, and upon a large block of stone beneath her window stood a tall young man, who spoke to her in a low voice. The air was mild, the silence profound, and, in the tranquillity of the sleeping town, the cathedral clock heedlessly sounded the hours.

Dear and painful memories of lost happinesss, how far off they now were! A sigh swelled the bosom of Lise, and she asked Michalon to play the piano to her. For hours, with a light touch, as if he had put a damper in the instrument, the giant executed waltzes, reveries, read at sight all kinds of musical compositions, procuring for Lise the delicious sensation of hearing a distant concert, and soothing her weakness.

Again the sick girl interrogated Claude upon the progress of his last rehearsals, giving him advice for Clémence with admirable sagacity. She seemed only to live through the play and for the play.

"Modify the end of the third act, my good Claude," said she; "there is a scene of tenderness; Clémence will not succeed in it. . . . Accentuate the situation, and push the *rôle* to violence. . . . She will be perfect in that! . . . Ah! if I could have done it, how I would have said the adieu! . . . Alas! the only adieu that I shall say now will be eternal! . . ."

Then with a smile which brought back the Lise of former days—

"But *mon cher* Claude, if you write a drama from my adventures you must change the *dénoûment*. . . . On the stage, crime ought always to be

punished and innocence rescued. . . . And you see what has become of innocence? whilst crime is triumphant! *C'est égal*, I have perhaps spoiled my life . . . as M. Nuño said to me. . . . I wished to succeed only through work. . . . I followed the severe and straight road of art . . . and I have not reached my goal. . . . Clémence took the capricious and glittering path of *galanterie;* she has made her fortune; she only worked in her moments of leisure, and she has attained her end. Decidedly, the actresses who are willing to live on the fourth floor, wear woollen dresses, drive in *fiacres*, and have but one lover, are not created for great triumphs. . . . The future is for those actresses who own a small *hôtel*. . . . Virtue on the stage is folly! And yet, if I had to begin over again, I would still do as I have done!"

Despite the feverish occupations of the last few days, Claude never once missed going to spend a long time every evening with Lise. When she did not speak to him, he remained silent, sitting near her bed, in the feeble glimmer of the night-light, and he heard, with a pang at the heart, the quick and panting respiration of the dying girl. Doctor Panseron was amazed that she was still living. The phthisis, which had seized upon her, was rapid. Lise was

sustained only by her determination not yet to die. Michalon, who habitually spoke little, gravely pronounced these words, which made Claude and the doctor shudder—

"She is waiting for the first night of La Barre's play."

And it was so. She wished, before her departure, to know if her friend would have the great success that she had predicted to him. The day of the general rehearsal, she exacted from Claude a promise that he would visit her before going to the theatre. She saw him trembling, anxious, clasped his hand, and smiled at him.

"All will go well," said she. "I am sure of it. Have no fear. I saw the play in the night. . . . It is admirable!"

What did she mean by "I saw?" Had she, in her memory, thought over all the events of the drama, or, thanks to that gift of second-sight possessed by the dying, had she witnessed the marvellous spectacle of Claude's work played, for herself alone, by supernatural beings? In any case she had spoken the truth. The general rehearsal, given with closed doors in presence of the critics on the leading journals, and a few privileged persons, produced a considerable sensation, and the rumour spread over

the Boulevards and in the clubs, that the Théâtre-Moderne was on the eve of a prodigious success.

At midnight, La Barre started on foot, towards his small chamber in the Quartier Latin, having, however, the wherewithal to take a carriage, for he had just sold his play at a good price, to England and to Germany. He was sorrowful, in spite of the compliments that he had received.

Arrived at the corner of the Porte-Saint-Martin, and of the Rue de Bondy, he paused. It was here that, the evening of the supper in honour of the hundredth representation, he had quitted Lise and Jean. They had taken one way, he the other. They had gone to ruin and to death, he had gone to triumph and to glory. Claude cast a glance back at the theatre which reared, in the obscurity, its black mass, pierced with luminous spots, and, addressing to it a gesture of menace—

"You, and all those whom you contain, who have cost me so many mortifications, humiliations, and griefs, you must now indemnify me for all that you have made me suffer!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

N the morning of the first performance of *Les Viveurs*, Clémence went to Saint-Pierre de Chaillot, and burnt before the altar a wax-candle to exorcise her ill-luck and to obtain the protection of Heaven. She had in truth played remarkably well the preceding evening, and relied upon a great personal success. Her path now appeared to her cleared from every obstacle, and she had only to walk straight on. Her prestige was reconquered, and in the theatre they treated her, as formerly, like a sovereign.

Rombaud had been amiable to her, and had given her all the places she required for her friends. This was a sacrifice, for the booking-office was besieged, and, from two o'clock, stalls were sold at the door for ten louis each. The agencies had sold out, and

letters were pouring in, from the *Ministère*, from the *Préfecture*, from the great bankers, from the clubs, requests signed by official and by celebrated names, perfumed notes sent by pretty women, and which were heaped up on Delessard's writing-table, redoubling the secretary's bad humour. He pulled his moustache, rounded his back, shook his office-porter, the decorated soldier Jacquin, and cried—

"But we have no longer a place! We are overflowing. It is a piece of madness! All Paris wishes to see this play! . . ."

Boxes were already taken for the following day. Rombaud, in the check-taker's office, his hat at the back of his head, answered all those who were arriving, gave himself airs, and, looking affectedly modest, repeated—

"The play promises well, without doubt! But we never know exactly whether we shall have a real success till the end of eight days! It is Madame Seigneur who will let us know it, next week, with her plan of the house!"

All the *habitués* were there, busy, humming. And in this great animation, in that fever, not a a recollection of the vanished star, not one word of regret for poor Lise. She had disappeared from the

surface of the Parisian world, the wave had passed over her, and it was ended—she was forgotten. Numbers of private carriages succeeded each other before the theatre, the horses pawed the ground, their bits held by footmen. And, like a gale of wind, the ticket-sellers rushed forward, offering their last *fauteuils*, or an excellent stall quite close to the orchestra.

"It seems that Clémence is superb," said Raynaud, who had not been able to come the evening before.

"Wonderful! . . . Oh! she will not stay at the Théâtre-Moderne. The Comédie-Française will take her. . . . How she has got on, that girl! . . . Do you remember her playing *La Fée des Fougères* at the Chatelet? . . ."

"She had very pretty legs! . . ."

"She has them still! By-the-by, have you heard that Nuño sent her a bouquet this morning? . . . They will make it up again. . . . That is positive!"

"*Dites donc*, Rombaud, I have not received my stall," exclaimed Adrien Gamard, who arrived quite breathless. . . . "Oh! but if I have no place, you know, *je fais les cent coups!* I shall disguise myself as a waiter at a *café*, and I shall come into

the theatre with a basket of caramels and cakes. And listen to this cry, '*Orgeat, limonade, bière . . . demandez . . . des oranges, des sodas, des glaces!*' . . ."

He gave this cry with such perfection that all the bystanders began to laugh. . . .

"Now, Gamard," said Rombaud, vexed at seeing the *gommeux* destroy the solemn gravity of the situation, . . . "you know well that it has only been forgotten. . . ."

"That is right! Ah! *mes enfants*, you do not know what has happened to Cécile Chrétien's Peruvian duke! The great noble from beyond the sea was caught, last night, *filant la carte*, at the club. The Inca was a *philosophe* of the first class! . . . This time it is no more in a boat that I will make her go, our poor, dear innocent; it will be in a galley!"

Pavilly, standing on the steps of the peristyle, was imparting confidences to Cretet.

"The play is much improved," said he. "La Barre began to understand that he must follow my advice. . . . I suggested to him the great situation for two. . . . You will see. . . . It is very good. . . . And Castorin has become a *rôle*. It will never be wonderful, but in fine it is

something! . . . Ah! we were obliged to fight before arriving at that! . . ."

"And La Barre? . . . Is he not at the theatre? I should like to ask him a few details for my *soirée*. . . ."

Then Rombaud came forward. He had his hands filled with information. And he could not be exhausted in complimentary anecdotes upon his author. . . . He made him great, he placed him on a pedestal. . . . What talent, and what modesty! And how well he read, and how well he acted! And then he was a collector, he had marvels at his house. The simple engravings, the books gathered together slowly and with difficulty, became art-treasures in the mouth of Rombaud. And the poor major was metamorphosed into a *Général de Brigade*, fallen heroically at Gravelotte. It was necessary to have *du fla-fla*, *du pompon*, *du grelot*, *du tam-tam!* La Barre's future demanded it, the prosperity of the piece also. And let the trumpets sound!

At five o'clock, La Barre made his appearance. He came with a gloomy face, into the midst of that animation. Rombaud pounced upon him, and, drawing him aside—

"Why, what have you been doing? Of what

are you thinking? Why did you not come sooner? You must show yourself! You are the hero of the day!"

La Barre answered with tranquillity that he had just come from Lise. And Rombaud, much annoyed at having to sadden his mind on a day like that, was obliged to ask news of her. The tidings were very bad. It was the end.

"Poor girl! Poor girl!" repeated the manager absently. . . . "Ah, but! *Mon cher*, we dine together, do we not?"

"I thank you," said La Barre, becoming frigid. "My evening is bespoken. . . ."

"What! Your evening?" exclaimed Rombaud. . . . "I really hope that you mean to come to the theatre?"

"No! I shall go to the Rue de Lancry. . ."

"You will not be present at this representation, which promises to be a triumph!"

"I shall be present at the last moments of a woman whom I cruelly regret."

"But it is madness! Why, your place is upon the stage! But what will be said? The whole of artistic Paris will come to the theatre this evening, and you will not be there! You will ruin yourself! You would, in one evening, become acquainted with

everybody! It would be notoriety, the precious *camaraderie* of all the well-known people, gained in an instant! Now, reflect! Do not carry out that mad project! Why women, there are thousands of them! . . . Actresses, one can find as many of them as one wishes! . . . See Clémence instead! *Cher ami*, do this for me: come here, where they will applaud you so as to bring down the lustre. . ."

"I will go where there is suffering."

Rombaud raised his hands to heaven, and let them fall again with dejection.

"What an obstinate man you are!"

"For the last six weeks, I have given proof of it," said Claude dryly.

And turning from Rombaud, he went to speak with Massol, reminding him of sundry small details in the *mise en scene*, and making sure that all was prepared and in order. Then, passing through the crowd, who already regarded him with sympathetic curiosity, he quitted the theatre, depriving himself voluntarily of one of the greatest joys that his literary life could give him.

Before the house, he met Jean, doing his daily sentry-duty beneath the window of Lise. He had waited thus, for two weeks, till she should permit him to see her, more impassioned in his repentance

than he had ever been in his love. He walked up and down like a lover who watches for his mistress, without ever seeing her come, and this tenacious waiting, on a dying woman, was indeed terrible.

The unhappy fellow went up to Claude without speaking to him, but his face was agitated by the eloquence of agony. The latter stretched out his hand for the first time, and clasped Jean's with compassion. He at length took pity on that grief, so persistent and so sincere. He felt that it was the "sister of his own."

"Follow me," said he.

"I shall see her?" exclaimed Jean, whose face was illumined with a ray of hope.

"If you do not see her, at least you will be near her," replied La Barre.

Jean looked at Claude with supplicating eyes—

"Oh! To see her, to speak to her, to throw myself at her feet, to ask her pardon! . . . Wretch that I am! It is I who have killed her! She loved me so much, and I suspected her, outraged her! But can nothing be done to save her? . . Michalon says that they have attempted nothing. . . . I, I would have disputed her with death. . . . And I would have wrested her from him!

"There was nothing to do, alas! It was her destiny to die. . . . She was too delicate and too fragile to withstand the conflicts of life. She was inevitably doomed to succumb. . . . She is going away peacefully, like an angel who re-ascends to heaven. . . ."

They entered. On the staircase they met a priest who was going down, and Jean cast a dismayed glance at Claude. He divined, in this sacred visitor, the supreme consolator who bears absolution to the dying. They found the door of the apartment open. Claude shuddered. He asked himself if Lise was already dead. Michalon reassured him. After having confessed, Lise had fallen asleep.

Jean remained in the *salle à manger*, with Claude and his friend. They were alone! The *bonne*, with Madame Capelle, arrived that morning, had just taken away *la mère* Fleuron, whose screams cruelly agitated Lise. Through the half-open door, Jean caught a glimpse of the curtains round the dying girl's bed, and heard her sibilant and laboured breathing. He remembered the pretty room at the *Cœur Percé*, where Lise sang so gaily in the morning. Her charming voice still sounded in his ears. She was then full of hope, full of joy. With delight she drank in the air and the sunshine, wearing an

embroidered *peignoir*, she went down into the garden to gather from the beds, flowers still humid with the dew. And she called to him gaily—

"Jean! Jean! come!"

Oh! the happy time, the lovely days! And now she was there, she would not see him, and she was dying. A flood of grief mounted to his lips, and, in his corner, he sobbed despairingly.

"Who is weeping?" asked the voice of Lise, hollow and suffocated. . . .

Michalon and Claude passed into her room.

"Who is there?" repeated she, with agitation.

"We were alone, La Barre and myself," said Michalon, closing the door of the *salle à manger*.

"It seemed to me that I heard Jean. . . . Poor fellow! You will comfort him when I shall be no longer here. . . . Michalon, promise me that you will never forsake him . . ."

She sighed, and lay motionless. Night fell, and the gardens were filled with shadow and with silence. The two men remained without speaking.

At eight o'clock Lise grew restless, and said—

"The first act is beginning."

She only thought of the play, and mentally, in her still lucid brain, she followed it through all its changes. She suffered terribly, and great drops

of perspiration flowed down her face. She asked Michalon to play to her Chopin's beautiful Funeral March, one of her sweetest *souvenirs*. And in a low tone she murmured—

"How lovely it is! It is the flight of a soul to Heaven. I should like that melody to accompany my last sigh. You will play it for me, will you not, Michalon? . . ."

She smiled—

"You see, always the stage! I do not wish to die without a tremolo from the orchestra. . . ."

She was silent, she was suffocating. Claude took her hand, and tried to transmit to her a little of his life and his energy. At eleven o'clock she spoke again—

"The fourth act! . . . Ah! the beautiful love scene! . . ."

Then she appeared to gather together her last powers in order to await the result. . . . Midnight had sounded, and they remained without news. The anxious eyes of Lise were fixed upon those of Claude. At a quarter to one, a rapid step was heard. The door opened, and Rombaud, radiant, appeared. He stopped abruptly at the threshold, and turned very grave; all his joy died away, he bowed, not daring to advance farther.

"Well?" interrogated the voice of Lise, faint as a breath.

"An immense success!" answered Rombaud.

Lise held La Barre's hand in her own. She pressed it with joy, and gave him a heavenly smile.

"I told you so!" murmured she. "I am content! . . . A happy fortune in the future, my good Claude!"

She breathed a sigh of relief, her head sank back, and her features became radiant with celestial serenity.

Claude rose, uttering a cry. As Michalon said, Lise, before dying, had awaited the success of her friend. The giant, his eyes filled with tears, opened the door of the *salle à manger*, and made a sign to Jean to enter.

"She forgives me?" exclaimed the miserable and distracted fellow.

Michalon pointed to the bed upon which Lise, her pale brow crowned with her golden hair, like a saint, reposed in her long sleep, and, with a sob—

"She is dead," said he.

Jean dropped upon his knees on the threshold of the chamber, and his heart broken, his brain benumbed, began to weep.

And, in the silence, the pure melody of Chopin, played by Michalon, faithful to his promise, rose, like a seraphic strain, lulling with its loved harmonies the last slumber of Lise.

THE END.